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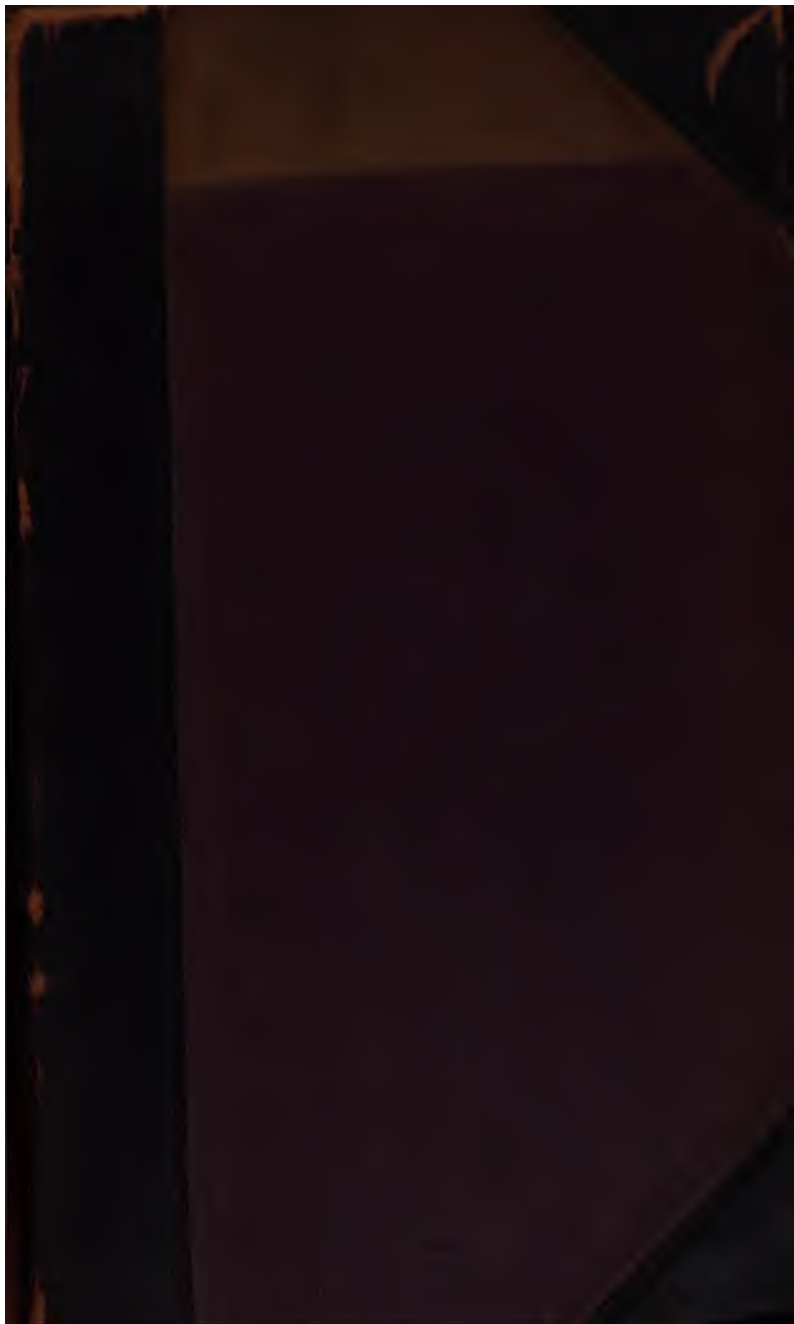
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FREE THOUGHTS
ON THE
SPIRIT OF FREE INQUIRY
IN
RELIGION;
WITH
Cautions against the Abuse of it,
AND
Perfuasives to Candour, Toleration, and Peace,
AMONGST
CHRISTIANS OF ALL DENOMINATIONS.

By **DANIEL TURNER, M. A.**

Prove all Things—hold fast that which is good.

PAUL.

HENLEY:

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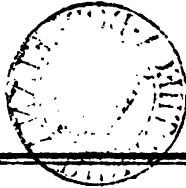
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CONTENTS.

SECT. I. <i>The Necessity and Importance of free Inquiry</i>	Page 1
SECT. II. <i>The Necessity of great Care and Circumspection in our Inquiries</i>	13
SECT. III. <i>The Necessity of adhering to first Principles</i>	39
SECT. IV. <i>A fair unprejudiced Study of the Scriptures recommended</i>	76
SECT. V. <i>Concluding Reflections</i>	114

E R R A T A.

Page 7. line 7. for *encouragements*, read *encouragement*

15. l. 3. bottom note, for *light*; read *lights*

63. l. 9. for *of his works*, read *his works*

86. l. 9. for *can do*, read *can it be done*

89. last line, for *or rns*, read *or rna*

91. l. 13. for *as the Son*, read *the Son*

100. l. 3. for *full*, read *fully*

l. 7. for *contary*, read *contrary*

118. l. 8. for *shuld*, read *should*

Some errors in the punctuation have escaped timely notice, which, it is hoped, the candid reader will excuse.

P R E F A C E.

THE chief design of the following
curfory reflections is to encourage the spirit of free investigation, respecting the most important of all subjects, Religion; and at the same time to guard those who indulge it against the danger of being so captivated with the charms of novelty, as to run into *new* errors, while they are giving up the old; and to this end, recommend to them, a due attention to first, and generally allowed principles, and the plain obvious sense
B of

of the sacred writings. A too superficial regard to this mode of conduct in their inquiries, and, as the natural consequence of it, a too hastily decided judgment, has been the inlet of many preposterous and dangerous errors.

It is really lamentable that a religion so plain and simple, in all its essential articles, as that of CHRIST, and so interesting to mankind, should be so miserably distorted and mangled by fallible men as it has been, more or less, ever since its first promulgation, and, indeed, ever will be, till the *spirit of free inquiry* has had its full scope, and prevails upon its professors to give up their *merely human creeds*, and *philosophical refinements*, and unite in the unadulterated doctrine of the BIBLE.

The

The author of these animadversions does not expect to meet with the approbation of the *violent* partisans of either the *orthodox* or *heterodox* side, because he is no friend to party despotism, but pleads for plain scriptural Christianity, moderation, and peace.

There are, however, *two points* which appear to him to deserve the most serious regard; and should not be so dogmatically opposed, and peremptorily decided against, as they too often are, viz. the *mediation of CHRIST*, or his *death as an atoning sacrifice* for the sins of men; and the *influences of the DIVINE SPIRIT* upon the human mind, in order to that repentance towards God, faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and obedience to his gospel, which is necessary to our eternal happiness. For these impor-

that truths, as they are stated in the Holy Scriptures, he professes himself an advocate, at the same time that he is so for *free inquiry*, being very confident, that if such inquiry be conducted with true Christian humility, sincerity, and candour, the result will be in their favour :—They are, indeed, so consonant to the feelings of the human mind, that the Heathens themselves have generally acknowledged them, as their sacrifices and prayers testify.

The author begs leave here to add, in the first place, that these reflections are really those of a man upwards of four score, who, from his earliest youth to this day, has made religion his particular study ; considered the subject again and again, and deliberately weighed the various opinions about

[v]

about it, which have so unhappily divided the Christian Church, as they came in his way; and this with all the impartiality of a sincere lover of truth. The candid consideration of this circumstance, he hopes, will apologise to the critical reader for the want of vigour in the sentiment, and accuraracy in the composition of the work before him; and also serve to moderate the zeal of the young bigot in favour of his party notions, on the infallibility of which he is apt to depend with such decided confidence; a confidence which (if capable of the least degree of serious reflection) he will find grow weaker as he grows in years, and improves in understanding.

In the second place, he desires it may be noted, that when he speaks of

common sense, respecting religion, he means,—“ That power or capacity in
 “ mankind, which we call mind, or
 “ reason endued with moral light and
 “ feeling, by which they are enabled
 “ to discern the difference between
 “ moral good and evil ; find a pecu-
 “ liar satisfaction in the one, and pain
 “ and misery in the other.” This
 is what constitutes in man the essen-
 tial distinction between HIM and the
Brute, and is indeed necessary to ren-
 der HIM a proper subject of the moral
 government of GOD.

To this principle in our nature,
 (call it reason, instinct, conscience,
 moral sense, CHRIST, the SPIRIT, or
 what we will) TRUTH is particularly
 agreeable; should preside in all our
 inquiries after it, and guide and form
 our judgment concerning it.—He
 calls

calls it *common sense*, because it is common to all mankind, more or less; the law written in *all their hearts*, by the finger of God*, even *in theirs*, who have not that *external scriptural revelation* which we enjoy; and is to them, (through such farther aid as the divine goodness may afford them) their ONLY guide in the concerns of religion and morals, and which enables them to work that *righteousness which is accepted of Him*. This was certainly the case with respect to the first fathers of mankind, before

* This principle is, by many, called the *Light or Law of Nature*; and the religion arising out of it, the *Religion of Nature*:—And what is *Nature*, but the creature of God.; or that constitution, habitude, or order of things, which He has appointed? The light of nature, therefore, in man, is as really and truly from the *Father of Lights*, as what they call, in contradistinction to it, *Revelation*; and the religion of the former, as entirely owing to his gracious benevolence as the latter.

before the books of *Moses* appeared, which were probably the first authentic records of a divine revelation ; was the case afterwards with the generality of the Gentile world, and is so now with those nations where our BIBLE is not known. And, in fact, this *internal principle* is, *even to us*, the common medium by which we judge whether our BIBLE itself be, indeed, a revelation from GOD ; and are enabled to give a reason why we prefer it to the *Koran* of *Mahomed*, or any other pretended discovery of the divine will ; or, in a word, why we are *Christians* and not *Infidels* : one reason is, we find that the leading doctrines of the BIBLE surpassingly answer to this *internal principle*, and the *just* sense of our condition as creatures under the moral government
of.

of God ; and to the fears, desires, and hopes, thence arising.

Were we to address an Heathen, with a view to persuade him to embrace Christianity, we must begin here; must remind him of the law written in his heart; and endeavour to take hold of those more general moral principles and feelings of which he is already possessed, and then point out such truths in *our written revelation*, as correspond with them, and are best suited to throw farther light upon what he but obscurely perceives; and as his understanding opens, and his moral sense awakens, display the character of JESUS CHRIST, as a SAVIOUR ; his power, dignity, and benevolence ; suitability and excellence ; and shew him that he is just such a Saviour as he wants. For this purpose

pose, the BIBLE (the New Testament especially) will furnish us with plenty of the most pertinent and convincing materials. An Heathen thus instructed, would find new sources of knowledge, virtue, and happiness opening upon him, *infinitely* more exalted, abundant, and delightful, than ever he had experienced before.

February 12, 1793.

D. T.

FREE THOUGHTS
ON
FREE INQUIRY, &c.

SECTION I.

The Necessity and Importance of free Inquiry in Religion.

THERE is something in religion so consonant to the nature of man, and his moral feelings, that there are very few of us who can be satisfied without some pretensions to it; but, at the same time, there is a strong propensity in too many to corrupt it; or, as the apostle expresses it, *pervert the right way of the Lord*, in order to accommodate it to their depraved inclinations.

This

This mischievous disposition began to shew itself so early as the days of *Cain**, the first man born of woman, and has continued to do so, more or less, even to this day. For, though far more abundant light has been thrown upon sacred TRUTH, under this last dispensation of the gospel, with which we are favoured, by the ministry of the SON of GOD himself, and his divinely inspired servants; yet it was soon adulterated by men of corrupt minds. The Jewish *Pharisee*, and the Gentile *Philosopher*, professing Christianity, too often mixed their respective prejudices with its purest doctrines, even in the apostolic age. In the next and succeeding ages, the corruption prevailed.

* The apostle tells us, *that by faith ABEL offered a more excellent (πλὴν more abundant) sacrifice than Cain.* That is, say some learned critics, offered, not only the *Minkoa*, or meat offering, but the life of an animal also, as believing in the promise of the forgiveness of sin, through the medium of *atoning blood*, to which *Cain* paid no regard.—See *Dr. Kennicott's Dissertation on the Sacrifice of Cain and Abel.*

prevailed to such a degree, that, at last, little more than the mere *outlines* of that blessed religion was to be found amongst the generality of its professors, till the Protestant Reformation took place ; and since that happy period, too many of the doctrines of that reformation have been, and still continue to be, most miserably corrupted.

The general source of this evil is the depravity of the human nature, and those wrong habits of thinking, that arise from education, human creeds, and the fashion of the times ; but more particularly from the PRIDE OF INTELLECT, or that self-conceited confidence in the all-sufficiency of our *own reason*, to comprehend every thing in religion, which we are so prone to indulge, and which too often leads us to renounce plain common sense, in order to gratify the vain ambition of being *wise above what is written* ; or, which is much the same thing as to the consequence, to pay a preposterous homage to
our

our own inventions, or those of other men, whom we wish to follow, rather than submit to the authority of the divine word, taken in its plain, simple, obvious meaning. Our reason, undoubtedly, ought to be used in the sacred business of religion, but we should be very cautious lest it carry us beyond the line.

As a principal means in the hand of the Divine Providence of remedying this evil, we may consider the SPIRIT OF FREE INQUIRY, which has of late years so greatly prevailed, not only in this country, but also in some others, where it has not the same encouragement as with us.

To answer this important end, this spirit is peculiarly adapted: it naturally tends to penetrate and dispel the darkness that hangs over the mind of man; to open it to conviction, remove its prejudices and bigotted attachment to peculiar forms and inventions of men; to enlarge its views, inspire it with the love of truth,

truth, and animate its researches after the knowledge of it, and if this spirit be sincere, the genuine offspring of the FATHER OF LIGHTS, it will never rest till it has brought the professors of Christianity to acquiesce in the ONLY *external* rule, or infallible standard of religious verity, the BIBLE, understood in its native simplicity and latitude of expression, unsophisticated by the super-orthodoxy of our high-flying theologians on the one hand, and the capricious refinements of our MERE critics and philosophers on the other.

This propensity in the human mind to examine what is proposed to it under the idea of *divine truth*, is natural, and arises from the consciousness we feel of an *inherent right* of thinking and judging for ourselves about it; if we have no such right, our inquiries here can be of no use but to torment us, or, at best to amuse us with empty speculations. Our blessed LORD, however, supposes such a right, when

when he bids us *search the Scriptures*; for to what purpose do we search them, if, when we have done so, we are not permitted to judge for ourselves concerning the truths we are there taught, but are obliged to submit entirely to the judgment of other fallible men; or before we venture to believe any of the doctrines, or practise any of the duties of religion, however important to our happiness, must wait the determination of some general council or synod of divines, and this to be enforced by the authority of the state; and, perhaps, after all, be compelled, upon the severest penalties, to believe and do what our own consciences absolutely forbid? This, in fact, has been too often the case; for this spirit of free investigation in religion has been always strenuously opposed by that of dogmatical bigotry, superstition, and ecclesiastical despotism, in every Christian country, more or less, and sometimes with the utmost rage of persecuting violence, under the pretence of its dangerous

dangerous tendency. It must indeed be confessed, that this spirit has now and then, in some instances, lost its way, and led the unwary into error ; but, notwithstanding this, where it has been most prevalent, and met with the most encouragements, its exertions have been productive of the most important and salutary effects, particularly within the two last centuries, as appears with glorious evidence in the deliverance of the church from the tyranny and corruptions of Popery ; the eager thirst after knowledge that prevails amongst all ranks of people here ; the expulsion of the Jesuits, the abridgment of the papal power in *Germany*, and elsewhere, and the late astonishing effort in favour of civil and religious liberty, that has taken place in *France*, and which has produced one of the most extraordinary national revolutions ever recorded in the history of mankind, the deliverance of

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the

the *Israelites* out of their bondage in *Egypt* excepted*.

From these and other appearances of the dispensations of providence compared

* It must be confessed that the enchanting prospect that seemed to be opening upon us at the beginning of this Revolution, (when the above was written,) has been since miserably obscured with the horrid gloom of *anarchy*, and such deeds of violence, injustice, and cruelty, as are, to the last degree, shocking to humanity, and cover the fair face of liberty with confusion. But it is to be hoped, after some farther painful struggles amongst themselves, and rebukes from the ALMIGHTY for their national vices, they will unite in some form of government, consistent with the enjoyment of just and rational freedom, and that peace and good will towards the rest of mankind which true Christianity teaches. At present, they appear to be too much under the influence of a set of men of the most abominably vicious characters that ever disgraced human nature, while the wise and the good, *deceived* by their specious pretences, or *terrified* by their savage menaces; behold the dreadful torrent of misery coming upon them unable to resist its force.

N. B. This note was written January 22, 1793, since which we have been informed, that this desperate faction have shed the blood of their late king !!!

red with the predictions we find in our BIBLES relative to the more universal spread of the Gospel, we may very rationally conclude, that some great change for the better in the religious and moral state of the world is approaching, when the dark clouds that now veil the lovely face of TRUTH, will be dispelled, and her sincere votaries have the unutterable pleasure of beholding her in all her native simplicity and beauty, and every species of tyranny be banished from the earth.

Through the prevalence of this inquisitive spirit, the various systems of *unscriptural orthodoxy*, which have been invented with so much laboured art, and supported with such furious zeal amongst Christians, begin to shake even to the foundation, and the poor astonished bigot stands trembling for the fate of his *idol*; while superstition and priestcraft endeavour to hide their weak heads, as

half ashamed, of their folly. Even the *Roman Catholics* (as they are called) of the present day, very sensibly feel the power of this spirit enlightening their understandings, weakening their prejudices, enlarging their hearts, and inspiring them with a degree of candour and moderation unknown to their ancestors.

That system in divinity, in particular, which represents the sovereign power and justice of the DEITY at perpetual variance with his benevolence and mercy; his secret will, as operating in direct contradiction to the most expressed declarations of his revealed, and which, therefore, so manifestly tends to overturn the very foundations of his moral government in our world; this shocking system of *Antinomian theology*, though once countenanced too much by some few learned and even pious divines, in the super-abundance of their zeal for the doctrines of grace, is now deservedly
sunk

sank into obscurity, renounced by the most serious and judicious *Calvinists* themselves, and favoured only by a few ignorant and self-conceited men, who by their blustering noise about *truth*, *free grace*, the *Gospel*, &c. and railing at all who differ from them, by which they generally distinguish themselves, may, indeed, impose upon a few weak well-meaning Christians for a time, but will never be able to make a lasting impression upon any truly serious and thinking mind, in favour of their sentiments, or attach to their party any man of common sense, endued with the least spark of the light that attends the spirit of liberal investigation. The great danger to a sincere inquirer, not sufficiently cautious, arises from a quite opposite quarter, the sophistical dexterity of our more enlightened theological chymists, the minute philosophers, and hyper-critics, who, under the pretence of analysing and refining the doctrines of Christianity

by the strength of their own fallible reason, evaporate their essential spirit, and leave us nothing comparatively, but a mere *caput mortuum*, a something without taste, and without efficacy. It is HERE the honest inquirer, if not very strictly upon his guard, is in danger of losing his way. The brilliancy of genius, the glare of new light, the loud boasts of superior knowledge and rationality, so common amongst these gentlemen, all conspire to dazzle his understanding, confound his judgment, and lead him, before he knows where he is, into many gross and often dangerous errors. Hence

SECT.

SECTION II.

The Necessity of great Care and Circumspection in our Inquiries.

THERE is scarcely any thing more common than to see mankind running out of one extreme into another, even in religion, through the too great confidence they have in their own mental powers. Hence, while they throw off the shackles of an irrational bigotted attachment to *merely* human creeds, and systems of divinity, with which the church has been so long pestered, they are so charmed with their new light, and their minds open so widely and eagerly after novelty, that they swallow, with greediness, every thing proposed to them under the pleasing idea of *truth, not before discovered*.* One new thought ex-

C 4

cites

* There cannot well be two greater extremes than *Superstition* and *Atheism*. And yet sometimes, the
Superstitious

cites another, and that another, and so on with such rapidity as will not suffer them to reflect, till, before they are aware, they are plunged into the dark gulph of false philosophy, or that presumptuous wisdom of fallible and depraved men, who set their faces against the religion of CHRIST, or its essential and distinguishing doctrines, at least ;
which

Superstitious Dupe, with a mind half enlightened, and beginning to reason without grace, is seen to rush headlong into downright *Atheism*. On the other hand, the *Atheist* sometimes finds a ray of light breaking into his benighted soul ; his moral sense is awakened, and therefore, after all his reasonings against it, he fears there *may be a God*, and a future state of existence, where he can expect nothing but misery. In this distress, he looks about him for relief ; he imagines superstition can give it, without the painful trouble of repentance and reformation. He applies to the *priest* ; confesses his sins ; pays his fine, and receives absolution, with leave to go on in his beloved course of vicious pleasures without any danger, only repeating the same farce occasionally, as new troubles arise.

which the Apostle calls *vain philosophy**; a philosophy, whose pretended light in religion, is real darkness; *darkness that may be felt*, and has been fearfully so in its *strong delusions*. If metaphysical speculation happens to be the taste of its professors, they will aim at philosophysing Christianity; and, in order to bring its sublime doctrines into a perfect consistency with their *partially enlightened reason*, will labour to reduce them to the level of its comprehensions.—They think not only *freely*, but even *licentiously*. If *verbal criticism* be their ruling passion, they will so refine upon the several texts that

* *True philosophy* is undoubtedly a real friend to *true religion*, the religion of CHRIST; and many of its most celebrated professors have pleaded the cause of that religion with great ability and success; they are both derived from the same fountain, the benevolent *Father of Light*; and therefore must of course harmonize in every thing essential to the duty and happiness of mankind.

that stand in the way of their favourite hypothesis, as to rob them of all their natural spirit and life, and thus sacrifice *truth* upon the altar of vanity. In short, the fact is, that many excellent well meaning geniuses, by following these deceptions too implicitly, have been so infatuated, as not only to reject, with the most decided confidence, some parts of even the New Testament, that happen not to coincide with the dictates of their *infallible reason*, but also to call in question the divine inspiration of the whole; and so on, till they have been led into the wilds of *infidelity*; while some, possessed of a lower degree of rationality, and much natural perverseness and obstinacy, become still more the dupes of blind credulity and mad zeal; hug the chains of mental slavery, and rivet them the faster upon them.

While, therefore, we cherish the spirit of *free inquiry*, let us exert our utmost endeavours

endeavours to guard against the dangers to which it may expose us ; and to steer between the extremes of a *gloomy dogmatical imaginary orthodoxy*, on the one hand, and of the over-refined speculations of the *vain philosopher and hyper-critic* on the other, resting in the *simple truth* as we find it in our BIBLES ; always bearing it in our minds, that though it be the province of that *reason* which GOD hath given us, to examine the evidence, and doctrines there recorded, yet that this should be done with reverence and serious consideration, not requiring more evidence than the nature of the thing will bear, or honest unprejudiced reason demands ; remembering also, that our reason is *fallible*, and has its *limits*, beyond which it cannot pass, without the danger of losing itself ; and it is folly in the extreme, so confidently to rely upon its powers as to imagine we can see through the whole of the immense plan of infinite wisdom,

and

and account for every circumstance in the facts and doctrines contained in the BIBLE; or, that we should be able to solve all the difficulties that may arise in a close and attentive view of them; it is indeed impossible, and by no means necessary to our duty or happiness.

Too many, conscious of the superiority of their reasoning powers, and too implicitly confident in their strength, are apt to overlook their real weakness, and rashly conclude, that nothing ought to be admitted as truth, but what **THEY** *can fully comprehend*. They forget that our business is properly with the *facts* recorded in the Divine Word, and their *uses*; and with the *doctrines* and *moral truths* thence arising, and not with the **MODES** of the production of the one, or the *abstract nature* of the other, which must, in many instances, extend beyond the line of our comprehension. It is owing to the want of this distinction, that the philosopher is so ready to object
to

to divine revelation. He forgets that he believes his own existence, though ignorant of the *mode* of it, in many particulars, relative to his body as well as his mind. He knows *that* he is; but *what* he is, finds himself in many respects miserably in the dark about, whenever he minutely inquires.

Here it was that that half Christian, half Deist, *Rossseau*, in his *Emelius*, stumbled and fell, into the awful darkness of scepticism. After giving us a most lively, just, and convincing account of the evidences in favour of Christianity, in his comparison between JESUS CHRIST and *Socrates*, he concludes, "After all, this same Gospel is full of things incredible, and repugnant to reason, which no man of sense can either conceive or admit. What then is to be done? What conduct shall we observe amidst such contradictions? Let us be modest and cautious; let us respect in silence, what we can neither

ther

"ther reject or comprehend; let us
 "humble ourselves before the GREAT
 "BEING, who alone knows the truth."

Had *Rousseau* followed his own advice, and sincerely humbled himself before the GREAT BEING, surely, he would not have dared to say, "That the Gospel
 "was full of things repugnant to reason,
 "and which no man of sense could admit." He seems to have forgotten that the powers of our weak depraved reason, are not the real standards of *all truth*, or even of all *conceivables*. Men of enlarged knowledge and rational improvement, can easily conceive of many things that are utterly inconceivable by the more ignorant and illiterate. Angelic minds, that are desirous to look into our holy religion, no doubt, perceive a clear consistency in many particulars that are above our comprehension. True humility consists in admitting this idea, and in giving it its full scope in the subject before us; and teaches us not only
 humbly

humbly to *wonder*, but also humbly to *believe*. The child of four years old cannot be supposed capable of comprehending the reason and consistency of many things his father teaches him, and requires him to believe, and commands him to do as right and fit; but he would be justly considered as very foolish and undutiful if he refused an implicit confidence in his father's wisdom and goodness, which he was every day experiencing, and would not submit to his authority.

It appears, however, from the sacred records, that the time will come, when there will be a much greater degree of religious light thrown upon the minds of men:—"When the knowledge of the
 " LORD shall cover the earth as the wa-
 " ters the seas; when the veil shall be
 " taken away from the hearts of the
 " *Jews*, and the fulness of the *Gentiles*
 " shall be brought in;" when pure and
 genuine

genuine Christianity shall have a more universal spread than ever ; and its professors be more generally and entirely united in their sentiments about its doctrines ; and where they differ, be indeed of one heart and one soul, in true Christian candour and charity.

To this great event, the spirit of free inquiry is preparing the way, under the direction and controul of the Divine Providence, both in this and other countries, and should therefore be encouraged. This disposition in the minds of men is indeed absolutely necessary in the natural course of things for the acquisition of useful knowledge. The man that never inquires after truth will never find it. He that believes without examination, merely by rote, believes he knows not what, nor wherefore ; it *may* be *truth*, it *may* be the *grosslest error* ; it *may* be consistent with reason, or an absolute contradiction to it.

But

But this happy period will probably be preceded by much *spiritual* darkness and error, infidelity and vice, in various forms*, and in particular instances even

D

amidst

* Some symptoms of these evils are past, and some now amongst us; witness the *Priestleyan* Divinity on the one hand; and the *Swedenborgian* on the other. The leaders of these parties appear to be honest and virtuous men, sincerely meaning to serve the interest of Christianity; both men of genius, and great literary accomplishments, though so sadly mistaken in their religious opinions. The one, misled by too great a confidence in the *infallibility of his own reason*; the other, by the *reveries of an enthusiastic imagination*. Both seem to aim at giving us a *more perfect gospel* than what we find in our *BIBLES*: The one, by retrenching its redundancies; the other, by supplying its defects with new discoveries.

As to *infidelity*, its progress is alarmingly rapid. Many are the *fools that say there is no God*; more that say there is no **CHRIST**. The consequence is, that *vice*, in all its most shocking forms, is enforced by the example of the *great vulgar*, and imitated by the *small*; while too many, even of the professors of religion, take up with the form, without the *power* of it; and plunge into the business and pleasures of the world, with all the spirit and taste that distinguish the men of it.

amidst the increase of much philosophical speculation, and many other kinds of knowledge; though at the worst there will be still a spirit of grace and supplication, of evangelical piety and virtue, resting upon a considerable number; and the inquisitive disposition be stimulated by all these circumstances.

This is the usual course of the divine providence in the conduct of its benevolent operations in the moral world. Very gross darkness and idolatry overspread the earth when the patriarch *Abraham* was called to the knowledge and worship of the true GOD. This was the case at the revival of religion amongst his posterity, under the ministration of *Moses*. And long after this, when the *Jewish Church* and *Heathen World* were miserably sunk into spiritual ignorance, infidelity, and every kind of vice, notwithstanding the light afforded the one, by their divinely inspired prophets; and, to the other, by their learned philosophers;

phers; then was the time of our blessed Lord's appearance in our flesh in our world, and of his opening the present illustrious dispensation of his Gospel. It is the peculiar glory of the GOD of wisdom to bring light out of the bosom of darkness, and display the riches of his goodness, in the seasonableness of its triumphs, over the malevolent powers of sin, and which will at last be complete and illustrious.

We are continually hearing of the vast improvements that are every where making in all kinds of knowledge*, and

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how

* That great thirst after knowledge which animates the spirit of inquiry after truth, is naturally productive of much philosophical light, and even speculative acquaintance with religion; but, while human nature continues so depraved as it is, our reason so short-sighted and liable to the bias of prejudice; and so puffed up with the pride of scientific acquirements, we shall be strongly prone to abuse our advantages, by exalting the powers of *reason* above *revelation*, and by that means fall into many hurtful errors. To prevent this great evil, we should be very humble and watchful, constantly implore the divine guidance, and conscientiously follow the dictates of a sober and deliberate judgment,

how greatly superior our acquaintance with philosophy, criticism, and every subject of literary and rational investigation, compared with that of our forefathers; and it must be granted, that there is some reason for paying this high compliment to the genius of the present age; but still, it should be remembered, that *this kind of knowledge* is very different from that which enables us to enter into the essence of true religion, or that constitutes a just acquaintance with the spiritual *kingdom of GOD*, and of his *CHRIST*, as appears with abundant evidence from the whole *BIBLE*, and particularly from the New Testament.

It is true, philosophy, even in its present imperfect state, has done, and continues to do eminent service to the interest of religion, through the over-ruling wisdom and goodness of *GOD*, and this without the professors of it meaning any such thing. It naturally tends to cherish
the

the spirit of investigation; push the human mind into motion; remove its irrational prejudices; file off the rust of bigotry, and give it a more liberal cast; all which must greatly assist our researches after truth. The like may be said of reading history, travelling into other countries, and our present extensive commercial intercourse with the world. But even all this is by no means sufficient of itself, for the right and effectual understanding of the religion of JESUS CHRIST. So far from it, that while, in some more remote and general respects, it serves its interest, it is often the occasion of much injury to it in others, through the depravity of our natures. The splendor of this otherwise useful knowledge is often too strong for the mental eye, at its first openings in religion, and therefore bewilders and misleads the inquirer into it; but as the mind strengthens, and is able to reflect soberly, it will

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perceive

perceive its mistakes ; grow weary of fruitless researches into things in their very nature incomprehensible ;—will contemplate every object more cautiously, and thus find, by happy experience, that *true philosophy and Christianity* are in perfect unison, and therefore can never appear in opposition to each other.

The world, in general, seems now in much the same predicament, as to *speculative knowledge* and the more clear and abundant manifestation of the Gospel, and its salutary effects which we are expecting as it was when our blessed LORD made his appearance in the flesh, and opened that new dispensation of it we now enjoy ; the *Jews* were then free from those gross prejudices in favour of idolatry, which disgraced the days of their forefathers, and so miserably polluted their country ; for at this
time

time they worshipped the true God, in their way, and abhorred the idea of a molten or graven image, as an object of devotion; they had also their schools of learning, such as they were, and plenty of priests, and scribes, and doctors to instruct them in the law of their GOD, and had made some progress in human science:—The Heathen nations then enjoyed all the light of their ancient, and (to them) modern philosophers, collected as it were, into one body. But amidst all these advantages, both *Jews and Gentiles* were as far from the genuine, pure, spiritual knowledge of true religion as ever, and in some respects farther. The Jewish rabbies had speculated, criticised, and refined away all the plain common-sense meaning of *Moses* and the *Prophets*; and most of the philosophers of the Gentiles had reasoned themselves out of their reason, and by their enormous vices,

vices, so darkened the moral intellect and spirit striving in them, that they had entirely lost that little right knowledge of GOD, and his moral government and worship, which their forefathers possessed in the first ages of the world.* But when, amidst this awful mixture of light and darkness, it appeared, with full evidence, that the world by its *wisdom knew not GOD*, he was pleased to open a source of knowledge of which they had no idea, by sending his dearly beloved SON amongst them, CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY; and through this medium give them just views

* Man, in his fallen state, though blest with the light of reason, and of the moral intellect and feeling, finds these powers deplorably impaired, darkened, benumbed, impotent; that sin dwells in him, and the world about him full of temptations destructive to his happiness; and, consequently, is disposed to consider an external written revelation of the divine goodness to him as infinitely important and desirable.

views, of his adorable nature, perfections, and government; and of their guilt and misery, duty and happiness, in a way eminently calculated to display the excellency of his *own wisdom*, and most effectually confound the PRIDE of the *Jewish scribe* and the *Gentile philosopher*, and thus make this SON, indeed, in the most important sense, the LIGHT OF THE WORLD,

SECTION

SECTION III.

The Necessity of adhering to first Principles.

FROM this view of things we may learn, that in order to conduct our inquiries into religion properly, and guard effectually against the mistakes into which we are liable to fall, it is necessary to have recourse to *first and generally allowed principles*, and keep them always in sight in every step we take in our investigation ; for *religion*, as well as human science, has its *præcognita*, or certain truths, that must be admitted, as self-evident, or generally granted, from whence we must commence our disquisitions ; for instance in the case before us :

That there is **ONE ONLY** self-existent ever living and true **GOD** ; a **BEING** possessed of almighty power, infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, mercy, and every possible

possible perfection ; that HE is the first cause of all other beings, the moral as well as natural Governor of the world ; that mankind, in particular, are the subjects of that government, and furnished, though in different degrees, with capacities, laws, assistances, &c. suited to that purpose ; that there is an immutable eternal difference between moral good and evil ; the former connected with happiness, the latter with misery, by the sovereign will of GOD, or as the natural and necessary result of his moral perfections ; and that there is a future state of existence designed for mankind, where this connection will appear in its full perfection in the complete and everlasting happiness of the righteous, and the inexpressible misery of the wicked ; that mankind are here in this world in a state of moral darkness, depravity, and wretchedness, yet not without the means and hope of deliverance.

None

None but absolute *Atheists* will pretend to deny the *substance*, at least, of these leading truths; and with *Atheists* we have nothing to do here; they are not inquirers after religious or moral truth. It is enough for our present purpose, that the sober and most intelligent of mankind, of all parties and all ages and nations in the world, by whatever means they came by them, and so far as they were acquainted with them, have acknowledged them, at least, in *theory*, however they may have contradicted them in *practice*.

There are many other truths connected with these, which are necessary to constitute a system of religion perfectly suited to the moral condition of mankind, and which, therefore, we may conclude the gracious FATHER of all would, somehow or other, communicate to them. And, blessed be his name! we have most abundant evidence that

that he has actually done so ; for if, with the above-mentioned general principles, duly operating upon our minds, we sincerely desire to know the *truth*, seriously and candidly peruse the BIBLE, and in that spirit of meekness, which becomes us, compare its *leading* facts and doctrines with them, we shall soon be convinced that it contains just such a revelation as we might reasonably expect from a wise, just, and good GOD ; a revelation admirably adapted to our condition, as rational and immortal creatures, under the moral government of GOD, and yet transgressors of his laws ; adapted therefore to give us the most clear and striking views of the purity and majesty, the goodness and mercy, of that government, and of our guilt and danger ; and, when by this means our moral feelings are awakened, to inspire us with the hope of deliverance, and so lead

lead us to our duty and happiness*. And if we believe the BIBLE contains such a revelation from the FATHER of *Mercies*, we may be sure he would there discover to us ALL the truths necessary to answer the end designed by it, and this in a *manner* sufficiently *plain* and *intelligible*; or in such terms of expression, in every thing essential, as were best suited to the *common sense* of mankind, and so as to supercede the necessity of all metaphysical investigation, and the refinements of philosophers and critics. Amongst these truths, the humble inquirer, who reads that divine book with an unprejudiced mind, open to conviction, will find the following, viz.

That

* Amongst a number of tracts, both antient and modern, that might be mentioned here, the author would recommend to the reader's perusal, a set of excellent *Sermons on the Divine Authority, and various Uses of the Holy Scriptures*, by his very worthy and highly esteemed friend, Dr. Samuel Stennett, whose many other valuable writings merit particular regard.

That man was first created in the moral likeness of GOD, in purity and righteousness ; that he is now a fallen, depraved, guilty, and therefore in many respects, a miserable creature ; that GOD hath, of his mere grace and mercy, provided for him a SAVIOUR from this wretched condition, in the person of his dearly beloved SON JESUS CHRIST ; that for the effecting this salvation, this SON was made flesh, dwelt in our world, and taught with peculiar clearness and power the great truths of religion ; particularly the forgiveness of sins to the true penitent ; or, that *in every nation, he that fears GOD, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him*, and shall enjoy everlasting life ; evinced the divinity of his mission by a series of the most astonishing miracles ; died upon a cross for our offences ; and was raised again to life for our justification ; is ascended into the heavenly world, and lives and reigns there the

LORD.

LORD of all; the Judge of the quick and the dead, dispensing unspeakable happiness or misery to every man according to his real character of righteous or wicked: and that the great end of this amazing discovery of the divine benevolence is, *to turn men from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto GOD; and to give them an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified through faith in CHRIST;* or make them wise, good, and happy.

These truths are, in the general, expressed in the BIBLE, in language so clear and decisive, *that he that runs may read them;* and, indeed, in these truths the generality of professed Christians agree, though they may differ in their *mode* of explaining them; or the *manner* in which our salvation is effected by JESUS CHRIST. These differences have been too many, and too often supported with shocking animosities, and the most cruel

eruel persecutions. Thanks to God, this is not so commonly the case now; yet notwithstanding all the more abundant light and candour of the present age, and the more respectful compliments paid on all hands to the sacred writings, as the professed standards of religious truth, there is still a mighty propensity amongst our dogmatical creed-makers, to load them with human inventions, under the pretence of explaining them, whilst some of our *rational* divines*, as they perhaps too presumingly

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* If by *rational* is meant the proper use of reason in religion, in contradiction to a blind fanciful, enthusiastic credulity, there are numbers who adhere to the plain scriptural statement of the facts and doctrines of Christianity, that have every way as *just* a claim to that appellation, as our more refined critics, and philosophers, who seem to wish to monopolize, it, in order, no doubt, to set a brighter gloss upon their peculiarities. There cannot certainly be any thing *more rational*, than for fallible short-sighted man

affect to stifle themselves, strive hard to explain many of them away in favour of their own particular prejudices; or at least, put a sense upon them very different from that which appears, to common understandings, to be originally intended, by the plain simple manner of expressing them which we find in our BIBLES. This might be shewn in many instances, would it not carry us too far from our object. There are, however, two great doctrines that *seem* to be *essential* to the Christian scheme of religion and its peculiar glory, with which, though expressed in the sacred writings in terms the most clear and explicit, too many of our rational gentlemen seem to be

man to submit his reasonings to the plain and express dictates of infinite wisdom, and

“ Where he can't unriddle learn to trust;”

And not hastily pronounce every thing he does not at present understand, an absolute absurdity.

begrievously offended, and labour with all their might to expunge from their creed. That is to say, the doctrine of ATONEMENT; or of the death of CHRIST, as an expiatory sacrifice for sin, and the appointed medium of forgiveness to the penitent sinner; and that of the REALITY OF THE SPECIAL GRACIOUS INFLUENCES OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT upon our minds, in order to the effecting that repentance, faith, and holiness, which is necessary to the enjoyment of God and eternal life. We have not room here for the full discussion of these subjects, but the inquisitive reader may consider the following brief hints. And first as to the great doctrine of the

ATONEMENT.

Taking this doctrine as it lies in the BIBLE, the objections against it seem to be so far fetched, over-refined, and extremely frivolous, that it is really

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astounding

astonishing to find men of sense and learning so seriously making them.

They tell us, " That it is a great
 " dishonour to God, to suppose, that his
 " mercy and grace to sinful men takes
 " its rise from any thing but his own
 " essential goodness."—We grant it;
 but reply, that God's appointing and
 giving his dear Son to be a propitiatory
 sacrifice for our sins by his death upon
 the cross, takes its rise *entirely* from his
 own *essential goodness*:—God *so loved*
the world, that he gave his only begotten
Son, &c. This then is a groundless ob-
 jection, a mere raising of a dust to blind
 our eyes.

But we are further told, " That the
 " supposition of an atonement, as *nece-*
 " *sary* to forgiveness, is as much as to
 " say that the goodness of God was not
 " in itself sufficient for the purpose, or
 " that without an atonement, he *could*
 " not forgive even the most penitent,"
 " and

" and consequently must leave him to
 " despair and misery."

We reply, we do not presume to say what God *could*, or *could not* do in this case ; it is enough to say, that whence-soever this necessity of atonement might arise, he himself has taken care to answer to it, by providing a proper one.— And this circumstance shews that this *necessity* does not arise from any *want* of *goodness* in God, or the *insufficiency* of his grace without it ; and consequently no sincerely penitent sinner can have any reason to despair of mercy. His case is just the same upon our ground as that of the objectors.

They say, " That to represent God;
 " as requiring an atonement, and ac-
 " cepting of it in the sinner's behalf, is
 " to destroy entirely the idea of the
 " *freeness and liberality of his grace*, of
 " which the scriptures speaks so highly ;
 " for, if he receives an equivalent atone-

" ment for our sins, his forgiving them
 " becomes a matter of *debt*, not of *grace*;
 " of *justice*, not of *mercy*."

We reply, this would be near the truth, were the sinner to provide the atonement; but as this is every way impossible, and God has, of his own *free goodness* provided it for him, the forgiveness is as much the matter of pure gracious mercy, as if granted without it; and indeed, sets the divine *liberality* in a still stronger light.

They tell us also, " That we are com-
 " manded to forgive one another, *as*
 " God forgives us; but that, as we are
 " not authorised to insist upon *any*
 " atonement before we forgive our
 " offending penitent brother, we *may*
 " be sure God would not require it;
 " our duty is, if our brother repent to
 " forgive him; and so, therefore, we *may*
 " conclude God forgives us, else we
 " could not be said to forgive *as* he does."

We

We reply, the cases are not parallel, which the argument supposes them to be. GOD is to be considered as a sovereign lawgiver and judge over us, and as such has a character to maintain, of the honour and dignity of which the scriptures represent him as exceedingly jealous ; but this is not the case between us and our offending brother. The *as*, therefore, here must be taken, in that limited and restrained sense it often is, and mean only *as truly, sincerely, and frequently*.

We are farther told by these gentlemen, “ that when the scriptures speak “ of CHRIST dying as a sacrifice for our “ sins, it is to be understood *figuratively* ; “ as our alms, praises, and the devotion “ of our bodily and mental powers unto “ GOD are called sacrifices.”

We reply, that the word *sacrifice*, in scripture, generally means something *offered* unto GOD, or devoted to his service ; sometimes it denotes a mere *gift*,

a thank-offering, &c. at other times a *propitiatory victim*, or the blood or life of some animal presented to God by way of *atonement* for some offence, or transgression of his law. The question is, in which of these senses we must understand it, when applied to the death or blood of JESUS CHRIST? and here, if we take the BIBLE for our directory, we shall find, that under the law of *Moses*, amongst many other kind of sacrifices; there were some expressly appointed for the expiation of guilt; or as the *indispensibly necessary* medium or condition of its forgiveness, and the transgressors restoration to the divine favour. It is evident that these *sacrifices* were not *figurative* but *real* with respect to the ceremonial guilt they were intended to expiate, as *real* as the guilt and its forgiveness. And if we believe the apostle's statement of the cases (Hebrews ix. 13, &c.) to be right, the *blood* or death of JESUS CHRIST

CHRIST has just the same concern in the removal of our *moral guilt* and restoration to the enjoyment of the favour of GOD forfeited by it, as the legal sacrifices had. in the removal of that *ceremonial guilt* to which they referred; that is, it is the true and *real medium*, the *fine qua non*, the *indispensible requisite* of the penitent sinner's forgiveness and reconciliation with GOD. Accordingly, the words in scripture, relative to the *death or blood* of CHRIST, as an *expiatory sacrifice*, are every where as clearly and strongly expressive of a *true and real* sacrifice, or *proper atonement*, as in the case of the legal sacrifices; such as his *bearing* our sins in his body; his *taking them away by the sacrifice of himself*; his being styled the *Lamb of God*, that *takes away the sin of the world*, &c. &c. In short, we may, with as much propriety talk of *figurative guilt*, *figurative pardon*, and call the sorrows, and pains, and wounds,

wounds, which the Saviour endured, *figurative*.—If guilt, and forgiveness, and reconciliation with God, be *realities*, such must be that sacrifice that removes the one, and makes way for the other.

If they still insist upon it, "That all
 " that is meant by CHRIST's shedding
 " his blood as a sacrifice for us, is,
 " that he thereby sealed and confirmed
 " the new covenant promises of for-
 " giveness and eternal life to the faith-
 " and hope of the humble penitent,
 " and that this was an *acceptable sa-*
 " *crifice* unto God, as all good works
 " are,"

We reply, that *Stephen*, and *James*,
 and *Antipas*, and many others, sealed the
 same testimony with their blood, offer-
 ing their lives as a sacrifice to God,
 highly acceptable; but we never read
 of their *bearing our sins* in their bodies,
taking them away by the sacrifice of them-
selves, or of redeeming us to God by their
blood,

blood. Here then is an *essential* difference between their sacrifices and that of CHRIST; their's were *mere offerings*; this of CHRIST, an *expiatory oblation*; theirs were merely *figurative sacrifices*; that of CHRIST a *real oblation* for the removal of guilt.

They also plead, " That it must be " gross injustice to require the *innocent* " to suffer for the guilty." We say, no, if the innocent suffers voluntarily, or by his own choice, does it for some important end, for a time only, and is abundantly rewarded for his goodness, which is the case here; *Jesus Christ* did freely and of choice suffer and die; and this to answer the most important ends in the moral government of GOD, and the happiness of mankind, and at last was rewarded with the highest honours and everlasting felicity. And it is certain, that as all suffering implies *guilt*, and JESUS CHRIST was perfectly innocent, he could

not:

not *justly* suffer on his own account; *his* sufferings, therefore, must be vicarious, or on the account of our guilt, in *our* stead, and for our deliverance from its ruinous consequences; or in the apostle's language, the *just for the unjust*, that he might bring us unto God.*

In fine, it is agreed on both sides, God does not forgive sin without respect to *some suitable consideration or reason*; The question is, what it is? whether the sinner's *repentance ALONE*, or *some expiatory sacrifice*, or both? If the former, then there is a *necessary prerequisite*, acknowledged; and the latter is no more. Since therefore the sacred writings say so much, and that so *strongly expressive* of the idea of an *expiatory sacrifice*, as the appointed

* 2 Cor. v. 21. The Apostle says, that JESUS CHRIST, who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. What could the innocent JESUS have to do with our sin, if his death were not an expiatory sacrifice for it?

appointed medium in this case, why should we not admit it; especially as by doing so we by no means set aside the necessity of repentance; but encourage and enforce it, by the most affecting motives? We, therefore, plead for both, for an *expiation*, as the *meritorious* ground or reason of the grant of pardon, and for *repentance*, as the proper *qualification* for the *actual receiving* and *enjoying* the invaluable blessing.

Upon the whole, does not *our* view of the death of the SON of GOD, tend to give us an infinitely more exalted idea of the majesty of the divine government, and the riches of the divine grace; render sin much more odious, and our obligations to repentance and holiness much more endearing, powerful, and animating, than *theirs*? Why then so much pains taken to get rid of the idea of a real and proper atonement by the blood of CHRIST? What advantage has the rejector

rejection of it, over him who embraces it, as to his duty and comfort in this world, or his happiness in the next?

And yet, astonishing to say, this grand truth, which runs through the whole BIBLE, gives a peculiar and vital energy to the whole system of evangelical religion, and the Christian's hope; and is, indeed, one of the most distinguishing excellencies in the REDEEMER'S character:—This important doctrine is not only flatly denied, but treated as an intolerable absurdity by too many professors of Christianity! One of these divines, scrupled not to say, to the author of these reflections, when talking upon this subject, "That the blood of CHRIST had no more to do with the forgiveness of our sins, than the blood of *Alexander the Great!*" This is speaking out with a witness! but does it not look too much like *counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing?* Others of them also tell

us in print, " That there is not *the least* hint in the BIBLE of mercy being granted to man, out of regard to the sufferings or merit of any other being whatever." Is it possible that these gentlemen can read their BIBLE *without prejudice*, or with a sincere desire to know and embrace the truth; or form their religious sentiments upon the plan there laid down? One would hope so; but it is to the last degree astonishing how it can be; especially when they read such passages as represent our receiving every mercy, and particularly pardon and eternal life, through CHRIST and *him crucified**.

And then as to the doctrine of
 DIVINE

* Amongst many excellent publications on this subject, the Rev. Martin Tomkins's *Christ the Mediator*, recommended by Dr. Watts, deserves particular notice; as does a small volume of *Sermons*, by my much esteemed friend Dr. C. Evans, late president of the Academy at Bristol.

DIVINE INFLUENCES.

It must be acknowledged that too many weak well-meaning Christians have sometimes talked very absurdly about this doctrine, and thereby furnished the opposers of it with objections; but it does not necessarily follow, that it is not, when rightly understood, both rational and scriptural.

The best things may be abused, and the most salutary truths perverted, but should not on that account be rejected.

If we ourselves, by conversation with one another, when present, or by epistolary correspondence, when thousands of miles distant, are capable of suggesting such instructions and motives of conduct, as shall induce us to act in this or that particular manner, can it be justly thought irrational to believe that the great FATHER of our spirits, *in whom we live, and move, and have our being*, who is tenderly concerned for our happiness, should

should, in some manner, peculiar to himself, and perfectly consistent with our natures as moral agents, convey to us such light, and suggest such motives as he sees fit and necessary to lead us into our duty, and enable us to pursue our happiness with success? Did he not do so, when *he opened the heart of Lydia, to attend to the things spoken by Paul*? It is certain, however, that all divine revelation in general, and prophecy and miracles in particular, especially the speaking at once in otherwise unknown tongues, must imply a divine influence on the human mind; and if this be the case in such *extraordinary* instances, why not in some degree in the more ordinary, seeing the main end in both is the same, viz. the instruction, holiness, and happiness of mankind; and when it is so glaringly evident that the moral depravity of the human nature renders it so extremely necessary?

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This

‡ This doctrine, however, is clearly expressed in the BIBLE*, and appears to be *universally* believed by the wise and good there recorded. There we find *regeneration*, or the *moral creation* of man, represented as *really* the work of God as the *natural creation* of the world. There it is positively said, that all true Christians are *born of God*; enlightened, sanctified, quickened, comforted, and delivered from the *law of sin and death by the spirit of life in CHRIST JESUS*; that he *sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts*; helps their infirmities, teaches them to pray, enables them to mortify the deeds of the body, &c. that *our sufficiency is not of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is*

* The Apostle (1 Corinthians, xii. 9) says, that no man can say that JESUS CHRIST is LORD (that is, become a true Christian), but by the Holy Ghost. And (Romans viii. 9) if any man have not the spirit of CHRIST, he is none of his.

is of GOD*. There we are informed of a *throne of grace, to which we may apply for grace to help us in every time of need*; but what occasion for this, if by a kind of *constitutional grace*, given us as men, with the external means of improving it, we are already in possession of every requisite for the effecting our salvation, independent of all further communications from the DEITY? Upon this supposition we have nothing more to expect from *him*, nor has *he* any thing more to bestow upon *us*, and consequently all applications to his throne, for any far-

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ther

* This doctrine is so connatural to the mind of man, that the more enlightened Heathens acknowledge it.— Seneca says, “*Miraris hominem ad Deos ire? Deus ad homines venit; imo (quod propius est) in homines venit. Nulla sine Deo mens bona est.*”— Sen. Epist. LXXIII.

That is, *Do you wonder that man should approach unto the Gods? God approaches unto Men; yea (which is still more to the purpose) HE ENTERS INTO THEM. No man becomes a good man without God.*

ther supplies of grace must be nothing better than a solemn farce, a downright mockery of the divine majesty, and our own souls. In short, the BIBLE abounds in prayers grounded upon the belief of this blessed doctrine which we are pleading for, with many a pressing exhortation to the duty, and many great and precious promises of success in it.* And, indeed, the prayers of these gentlemen themselves

* This doctrine, as stated in the BIBLE, is plainly thus:—That we are in ourselves fallen creatures, miserably depraved, and in danger of absolute ruin. That the *means* of our salvation are in our hands, with a power to use them; but that the power necessary to render them effectual, is in the hand of GOD; though with the promise of freely imparting it to those who sincerely seek it in the proper use of the means he has appointed. Thus the blessed GOD secures all the glory of our salvation to himself, and his free grace in CHRIST JESUS, and leaves the sinner that perishes without excuse. Thus exhortations and promises go hand in hand: and prayer for further grace appears a necessary and important duty. *Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.*

themselves are usually expressed in such language as shews, that they *believe* this doctrine when they pray, though they *deny* it when they *reason* about it. Into such inconsistencies men are often driven who feel the force of *truth* at one time, and that of their prejudices against it more prevalent at another.

The humble Christian, however, amidst the various trials of life, really sensible of his own weakness and insufficiency for the proper discharge of his duty, and the security of his happiness, will tell us, that he finds the firm belief of this doctrine afford him the greatest encouragement and support; inspire him with hope, give new vigour to his exertions; and that he can indeed *do all things through CHRIST strengthening him.* The rejectors of this doctrine cut themselves off from these resources of comfort, and must be left to fight their way through the many and powerful enemies to their

happiness they meet with, as well as they can. This however is not the worst of the case, for the doctrine they embrace in opposition to ours, not only leaves them thus forlorn and destitute, but has, indeed, a most pernicious and shocking tendency. The vicious are thereby taught to believe that they are of *themselves*, without any farther communications of grace, every way sufficient for the important business of securing their everlasting happiness ; and that they can at any more convenient season, whenever they please, repent and become truly righteous. This idea naturally tempts them to give the reins to their vicious propensities, and indulge themselves in the pleasures of sin, without the least fear of the consequences. In a word, the apostle charges us, *to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because God worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure* : But the language of
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of these gentlemen is,—“work out your
 “salvation *without* fear or trembling,
 “for you have it in your power to do
 “it at your own good pleasure.” Which
 of these is most like the language of
 truth, might, one would think, be left to
 the decision of any serious unprejudiced
 mind.

From this view of things we may fairly
 conclude, that all speculations on divine
 subjects, that tend to lead us out of sight
 of these *two important doctrines*, and to
 substitute any philosophical refinements
 in their place, should be suspected, at
 least, of being the nefarious offspring of
 that *pride of reason*, which mankind are so
 prone to indulge.

Instead of such bold and alarming free-
 doms with the *sacred word*, which some
 of our too curiously speculative divines
 so often take, would it not be much
 more becoming us to endeavour to im-
 press our minds with an humble sense
 of

of their weakness, submit to the dictates of that word, and simply believe upon the divine testimony, what our *sober reason* will tell us may be true, though we cannot comprehend the *manner how*? But some of our *rational gentlemen* have a most vehement aversion to MYSTERY, as they affect to call every thing in religion which happens not to suit their taste, or fall in with their preconceived opinions, and which, therefore, they wish to cast out of their creed. Hence they find this same objectionable *mystery*, not only in the unscriptural dogmas of our *over-doing* zealots for orthodoxy, about *original sin*; the *Holy Trinity*; the *miraculous conception of CHRIST*; his *atonement for our sins*; the *decrees of GOD*; the *extent of his grace*; and the *operations of his SPIRIT on the human mind*; but even the *biblical account* of these doctrines, and therefore reject not only the *former*, as in some instances they

they justly may, but the *latter* also, and give up the doctrines themselves, because they find *something* in them which they cannot *comprehend*; *something mysterious*; not duly considering that this is the case in the *natural* as well as *moral* world;—not only the *abstract* essence and peculiar perfections of GOD himself, but also of his works of creation and providence; many of the powers and properties of created beings; the support and government of the universe, yea even our own existence;—all abound with *incomprehensibles*; *something too high for us*;—*something mysterious*; and yet the things themselves are universally believed by us, well knowing that the full and perfect *comprehension of all* that belongs to the object of our faith, is no more necessary to our reception of it for the purposes of our duty and happiness, than the philosophical knowledge of the nature of human food, and the powers
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of digestion, is to the illiterate peasant in order to the common use of them for the support of his bodily life.

Much to this purpose *Dr. Priestley* has observed in the preface to his *Institutes of Religion*, " That the mind of man will " never be able to contemplate the " being, perfections, and providence of God, " without meeting with *inexplicable difficulties*. We may find *sufficient reason* " for acquiescing in the darkness that in- " volves these great subjects, but we must " never expect to see them set in a per- " fectly clear light."

Happy for the Christian cause would it have been, if the Doctor had applied these just observations to the great doctrines of the *pre-existence and miraculous conception of CHRIST*, the *Atonement*, and many other evangelical truths, which they are well adapted to support, instead of deciding so peremptorily against them as he has done. A good n

sometimes forget themselves, and lose sight of their own maxims.

It was a celebrated saying of the late *Dr. James Fyler*, and which, it is reported, the late *Lord Balinghame* of sceptical memory highly applauded, "where *mystery* begins *religion* ends." —The Doctor was a man of sense and learning, and a sincere friend to religion in his way, but here he certainly forgot himself a little; and it is often seen, when these very sensible people take it into their heads to talk absurdly, they do it to the purpose. The consciousness of the superiority of their own wisdom is apt to dazzle and confound them. They do not distinguish between the *real mysteries*, that must exist in the abstract natures and operations of *invisible* powers, and those of mere *human* invention: here *religion* is not *mystery* — acknowledged *as* *such* — *only* abused *as* *such* —

serve the purposes of superstition and priestcraft; they wrap up their absurd and pernicious doctrines in the veil of an unintelligible jargon, call them *holy mysteries*, and demand our belief of them as such.

In order to avoid this iniquitous folly, our rationalists are apt to run into the opposite extreme, and tell us *positively* that there are *no mysteries* in the religion of CHRIST; *nothing* required to be *believed*, but what we *comprehend*. They forget that there are many mysterious circumstances connected with the *facts* and *doctrines* recorded in the BIBLE, so *closely and inseparably*, that while we believe the one, we must also believe the other. Our blessed LORD intimates to *Nicodemus*, that there was something incomprehensible in the cause and operations of the *natural wind*, as well as in the productions of the new birth by the *divine SPIRIT*, and that as he believed the one, he might as *rationally* believe the other.

other. All *miracles* are *mysterious*, and yet we believe them; believe them as the effects of the divine power, though we know nothing of the *mode* of its operation in producing them. The apostle (1 Cor. xv. 51) calls the change that will pass upon the bodies of the dead and the living at the resurrection, a MYSTERY, as it most undoubtedly is, and yet spoken of as an *an object of faith* and hope, intended for our comfort;—we believe the *thing itself* will take place, though we knew not *how* it will or *can* be. An inhabitant of the Torrid Zone, may be induced to believe, upon the testimony of one whose knowledge and veracity he can trust, that water in our country often becomes a solid substance, of a consistency sufficient to bear very great weights; and yet reducible to its liquid state again; though he may not be able to conceive *how* it is possible. Hence these gentlemen also are so very
solicitous

solicitous to reduce the number of *miracles* recorded in the BIBLE. *Miracle* is the *fort* of the Infidel ; it affords him a most delightful fund of matter for declamation against the *Christian Religion* ;—this alarms them ; for with all their mistakes, they are the sincere friends of this religion, and many of them justly numbered amongst its ablest defenders ; but possessing a little too much of that *pride of intellect* which distinguishes their opponents, they feel themselves inwardly ashamed of a credulity so vulgar, as that implied in the belief of miracles, any farther than they are compelled by the irresistible force of evidence, and, consequently, exert their most strenuous efforts to explain away as many of them as they conveniently can ; and even venture to reprobate the idea of our blessed SAVIOUR'S *miraculous incarnation* ; or his being born into our world, in our flesh, out of the common
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course of nature, though the sacred writers speak of it as a *certain fact* ; and as one of the greatest glories of his exalted character. One of these rational divines* calls it, “ A monstrosity, exceeding all “ that ever poets feigned, all that savages ever believed!!!” This is bold talking; but is it consistent with that humble reverence with which the BOOK OF GOD should be treated? surely very far from it. And the only reason they can give for such presumptuous contradiction to the assertions of the sacred oracles, is, “ They cannot conceive *how* “ it could be !!!” And is there any one miraculous fact to be met with in the

BIBLE,

* *Mr. Baron's Cordial for Low Spirits*, preface, page 10.

Dr. Price in his sermons on the *Christian Doctrine*, speaking of the humiliation of CHRIST in becoming man, as *incomprehensible*, justly observes,—“ That those “ who will believe nothing the manner of which they “ cannot comprehend, must be in the way to believe “ nothing at all.”—Page 141.

BIBLE, that they can comprehend *how* it could be? for instance, the creation of the world; the resurrection of the dead; or of our blessed LORD's feeding so many thousands to their satisfaction, with five loaves and two fishes.

These and the like are dangerous refinements, and tend to strengthen, rather than weaken the cause of infidelity; however, it is certain they are not calculated to answer any good end, and are quite unnecessary and useless; for, after all the labour of these fastidious theologists in this way, there will still remain miracles enow in the BIBLE to afford the sceptic very sufficient scope for the exercise of his mischievous genius. Nor is there, indeed, any reason why we should be either ashamed or afraid to own that we believe the miracle of the *incarnation*, or any other objected to, which we find in our BIBLES; they are all equally easy to omnipotence, and the progress
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in each of them equally *incomprehensible*, and out of the reach of the understanding of the most penetrating philosopher. It is, in fact, to no purpose to get rid of one or two, or any number of the miracles there recorded, in order to avoid the sneers or cavils of infidels, while there is any one remaining ; the difficulties in all are in *reality* the same ; and the same kind of arguments, that would vindicate any one of them, would vindicate all the rest ; of which arguments we have abundant sufficiency without having recourse to such pitiful expedients as these over delicate believers suggest to us. Seeing then, on the one hand, that mankind are no longer disposed to take matters upon trust in the great business of religion, or implicitly submit to the dictates of other fallible men, as they used to do ; but will think and judge for themselves ; and yet, on the other hand, that such a variety of erroneous, and even hurtful

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opinions, are the consequence of their ardour for *free inquiry*, so generally prevalent, what is to be done ? To attempt to quench this investigating spirit, must be exceedingly impolitic, as well as unjust, and indeed impossible. Our duty then must be to endeavour to keep it under proper restraints and regulations; to *indulge* it, indeed, in ourselves and others, but with the MOST SERIOUS AND WATCHFUL CARE ; taking every step in our inquiry with an attentive eye on every side ; keeping our passions temperate, and our prejudices as much out of the way as possible ; having our minds open to conviction ; but particularly cautious of being imposed on by appearances, and the *first flashes of new light*.—To reject *all innovations* indiscriminately, or resolve to adhere, at all events, to any particular doctrine of faith, or mode of worship, merely because
it

it has the sanction of *antiquity**, discovers great weakness and folly ; nor less so an over eager catching at every thing that happens to wear the face of *novelty*. Our business is to avoid both these extremes, and follow the plain sober light of simple truth, as it shines in its first leading principles, *within* the humble heart, and still more abundantly *without*, in the written word.

The love of truth, so natural to the liberal well-ordered mind ; the consciousness of possessing a *right* to judge for ourselves in the concern of religion, and the liberty of exercising that right as we find occasion ; all tend to kindle
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* Upon this principle, there could have been no reformation from Popery, or even from Paganism ; and yet upon this absurd principle, *some*, even in this enlightened age, are raising a doleful outcry against *all innovations* in religion ; not considering that, in fact, *their errors* are *innovations* ; and the removing them nothing but restoring Christianity to its primitive purity.

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serve

SECTION IV.

A fair unprejudiced Study of the Scriptures recommended.

IN the Book of GOD we have a sure and infallible *directory* in the important business of religious inquiry ;—*A light shining in a dark place, to which we do well to take heed.* But, in order to avail ourselves effectually of this aid, we must use it properly ; that is with the deepest reverence and humility ; laying aside our prejudices, and submitting to its decisions with the *simplicity* of children ; without such a disposition of mind, this book will be of very little use to us in our researches after truth. But in this point, alas ! we miserably fail ! for though we (Protestants at least) appeal to the BIBLE, as the standard of our religious faith, yet to how little purpose, the spirit and conduct of too many
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of the appellants who run into extremes, very evidently shew. They refer one another to *this book*, not as it came out of the hands of the sacred writers, but as new modelled by themselves, to suit their respective systems of faith, or philosophical prejudices; and therefore, are still as much at variance with one another, and with truth, as if there was no such book in the world. This appeal, thus managed, is a mere farce; they do not in *reality* mean any such thing, on either side; so far from it, that we find them using all the art and sophistry they are capable of, to turn and twist, and even *torture* the sacred text, in order to support their respective *predetermined opinions*; and if they cannot do this by any other means, will flatly deny the authenticity of the text itself, and call it a forgery*.

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What

* Were we to expunge from the New Testament all those passages that exhort good men to their duty, and

call

What measures then shall we take to remedy this untoward situation of things? —Certainly if we mean what is fair and consistent with honest common sense in our appeals here, we must unite in the resolution of taking the words of scripture as they lie, and in their own natural unadulterated form and latitude of expression; with due attention to the context, occasion, and scope of the narration and argument in which any particular passage is found; or in that sense, in which an intelligent Pagan, who had never seen the book before, nor had heard of our controversies, but was sincerely

call sinners to *repentance*, to please the *Antinomians*, on the one hand; and those which speak of the divine dignity of CHRIST; his *pre-existence*; *miraculous incarnation*; the *influences of the DIVINE SPIRIT* upon the human mind, &c. to please the *Socinians*, on the other, we should reduce that blessed book to a very small volume indeed, where we should find little extraordinary to believe, and nothing at all to do.

cerely desirous of knowing the truth in religion, would take them, upon reading it attentively; interpreting what appears dark and doubtful, by what is more clear and certain; comparing one passage with another, and the whole with the *first* principles before mentioned;* accompanying all with earnest prayer to the FATHER of LIGHTS *to direct our hearts into his love*. In this way of proceeding, if sincerely desirous of *obeying* as well as *knowing* the truth, we may reasonably hope, that we shall be led into all *necessary* acquaintance with it, and so as to escape all material and dangerous errors. But if, instead of taking this plain rational method

* It is owing to the want of keeping those first principles constantly in view, and *the law written in our hearts*, which will always perfectly harmonize with the *contents of the Bible*, taken in their plain simple meaning; it is for the want of this, that there is such a strange diversity of religious opinions amongst us.

method of consulting the sacred oracles, we rashly and obstinately resolve to follow the dictates of our prejudiced imaginations as our surest guides, no wonder we should stumble and fall. And yet this is too often the case, not only with the hot-headed super-orthodox zealot, but with some other wise sensible well-meaning men of strong reasoning powers; too confident here, they are easily persuaded to give up the BIBLE, when it happens to stand in the way of their prejudices, and resign themselves entirely to the guidance of those powers.

Dr. Price, in a note, page 14, of his *Sermons on the Christian Doctrine*, tells us, his friend Dr. Priestley acknowledges, " That he does not think himself bound
" to believe an opinion, merely because
" it was held by an *Apostle*." What is this but calling in question *apostolic inspiration*; and acknowledging that the *Apostles* have said some things about
JESUS

JESUS CHRIST, and his great salvation, which the Doctor does not approve ? All appeals, therefore, to the BIBLE in our disputes with Dr. *Priestley* and his followers must beto no decisive purpose; for, they will, of course, whenever their cause requires it, appeal from that to an *higher tribunal, the infallibility of human reason*, weak and imperfect as it is, and this in matters of pure revelation !!! How lamentable that a man of Dr. *Priestley's* abilities and learning should be so egregiously mistaken !*

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* The Doctor, in his Letters to the Philosophers of France, page 38, flatly denies the divine inspiration of the Scriptures; the Apostle affirms it, Gal. i. 12. 2 Tim. iii. 16.—Which shall we believe?

The author of these reflections is not personally acquainted with Dr. *Priestley*; but by the report of many, who reprobate his peculiar opinions in religion, the Doctor is a gentleman of such piety and virtue, and possesses so many amiable qualities, that even Jesus himself, beholding him, must love him, as he did

The BIBLE, as to all its essential doctrines, is certainly meant by its divine author for the instruction of mankind in general, the people of plain common sense, in the important concerns of religion and virtue, rather than for the entertainment of philosophers and critics; to inform the poor illiterate labourer and mechanic, *what he should do to be saved*, and not to furnish the speculative theologian with materials for metaphysical creeds and pompous systems of divinity. Any sense, therefore, put upon the words of that book, respecting
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did the young ruler, of whom we read in the gospel; though at the same time say to him also, "One thing thou lackest; go thy way; lay aside the idea of the *absolute infallibility of thy own reason*, and its *all-sufficiency* to judge of every circumstance in the ways of God, or the dispensations of his grace to man, in which thou trustest with such *decided confidence*, and with the humble docility of a child; learn of me, and thou shalt possess treasures of heavenly knowledge to which thou art now a stranger."

its doctrines, that requires a great deal of refined reasoning to make it out, should, on that very account, be at least *suspected* of being wrong. Common sense here is a far better guide, than any sparks of our own kindling, however vivid and brilliant they may appear.

The information this DIVINE BOOK gives us of GOD, his perfections and government ; of our moral depravity and danger ; of JESUS CHRIST, his person and character ; the concern he has in our restoration to the divine favour ; and of the gracious operation of the HOLY SPIRIT in effecting the great work of our salvation ; is all expressed there in a manner most admirably adapted to the capacities and moral feelings of the common people, and so as to enable them to understand all that is necessary to their duty and happiness, especially when expatiated upon, and enforced by the public ministry, with a truly evangelical simplicity

simplicity of language, and serious energy of spirit.

From all this it is abundantly evident, that if we mean to be serious in our appeals to the sacred oracles, we must resolve to take matters as they are there stated, in the plain natural construction of the words ; or in the meaning which is the most obvious to common sense, and best adapted to the moral feelings of the heart desirous of knowing and obeying the truth, and which is least tainted with any of our theological or philosophical prejudices. In short, if we would indeed, get at the true sense of the sacred writings, and unite in it, we must lay aside our preconceived peculiarities of sentiment, sit with unfeigned HUMILITY at the feet of JESUS, his prophets and apostles, and learn of them. It was PRIDE, or the vain ambition of being wiser than his MAKER, that led man into sin and misery at first ; HUMILITY is the

the principle that must lead him out of it, and indeed *begin* his deliverance ; a principle too little attended to by our *hyper critics* and *metaphysical philosophers*, as well as by our *dogmatical divines*.

Though it must be allowed, that some advantages may be derived to the interest of religion from criticisms and metaphysics, when soberly conducted, and confined to the adjusting some of its circumstantial ; yet, when applied to its essential and leading doctrines, they do more harm than good, and are too often productive of very shocking consequences ; and, indeed, are seldom applied here, but to serve some favourite hypothesis ; nor even then, to any effect, without doing violence to common sense, or overpowering its efforts. The great doctrines of *redemption*, and the *forgiveness of sins*, through the *meretorious obedience and atoning efficacy of the blood of CHRIST*, and of the *salutary influences of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD*, upon our hearts, taken

as they are plainly expressed in the BIBLE, appear to be so closely interwoven into the *very substance* of the gracious revelation there given us ; so pervade the whole body of *Christian divinity*, and are so consonant to our moral feelings, that it requires a world of metaphysical sophistry and refined criticism to explain them away, nor, indeed can do it to the satisfaction of the truly serious and unprejudiced mind, and that really feels itself guilty of offending a *most holy and just* GOD. For such a mind, so awakened however confident before it might be in the excellency of its moral character, will find that confidence forsake it, and naturally look out for relief ; and learning something of JESUS, and his suitability to his case, will, of course, apply to him, as his only hope and consolation. The good creatures that can see no sin in themselves ; the self-righteous pharisee, and the self-sufficient philosopher ; charmed with the merit of their specious virtues,

virtues may flatter themselves with a title to the divine favour, without fear of disappointment, if they please ; but what must the poor illiterate sinner do, under the heart-appalling conviction of his moral depravity and guilt ?—Take away the idea of the blood of CHRIST, as shed for the *remission of his sins*, and of the *gracious efficacy of the DIVINE SPIRIT*, against their power in his heart, and you remove the very *foundation* on which his afflicted soul can rest with comfort, in the realizing views of death and eternity ! In short, in this over-refined system of religion, of which some of our *rational* divines are so fond, there is, to many serious people of plain common sense, whose moral feelings are alive, a kind of *deathful torpitude*, a mortal coldness, that chills the very vitals of religion and its blessed hopes within them ; they find it remarkably unsuitable to their condition as transgressors of the

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divine

divine laws ; enslaved by the powers of sin ; struck with the awful majesty and purity of GOD ; and yet anxious for an interest in his favour. To them the *gospel*, as it lies in the BIBLE, is indeed a *glorious gospel, a joyful sound* ; because it holds up to their view the LORD JESUS CHRIST, in that infinitely important and endearing character, the SAVIOUR OF SINNERS, *redeeming them to GOD, by his blood* ; and because it assures them also of GOD's gracious readiness to bestow his HOLY SPIRIT upon them who sincerely ask it, to enlighten their understandings, renew and sanctify their natures, free them from the law of sin and death ; guide them into all necessary truth, comfort them in distress ; conduct them safely through the dangers of life, and the dark valley and shadow of death ; and, at last, quicken their dead bodies, and secure them in the possession of eternal life and glory.

These

These are, indeed, heart-cheering truths, worthy of a wise and merciful GOD to reveal, and of all acceptance from us. And accordingly they have been found to be such by the happy experience of MILLIONS of otherwise perishing sinners, even *the power of God to their salvation.*

But is there any thing like this in the gospel of our refined evangelists? or do *they* talk in the language of the *prophets and apostles* about JESUS CHRIST?—The sacred writers speak of him in the highest stile of admiration, love, and praise. They delight to tell us of the dignity of his person, the exceeding riches of his grace, and the infinite worth of his blood :—They represent him as *existing before any creature, the image of the invisible God, the brightness of his glory*; by whom he made and governs the worlds, and all things therein; having **ALL THE FULLNESS OF THE GOD-**

HEAD DWELLING IN HIM, and so *one with the FATHER*, that he that hath seen HIM has seen the FATHER also.—They also represent him, though in the *form of GOD*, yet, in the fulness of time, as laying aside that form, and taking upon him that of a servant in our flesh, dwelling in our world, a man of sorrows, and at last dying upon a cross for our salvation; but as now risen from the dead, living for ever in the heavenly world, and there enthroned and crowned with glory, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the light and life of men; receiving the highest ascriptions of honour, and blessing, and praise from the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect; while too many of our more refined teachers appear solicitous to avoid saying any thing remarkable about him, and very seldom even mention his name, unless to lower the idea of its divine excellency and

and throw a veil over that illustrious glow of character in which the sacred writers exhibit him.—They allow, indeed, that he is a great prophet sent of God, to teach mankind some good lessons of morality ; assure the penitent of pardon ; promising to those who persevere in righteousness, eternal life ; setting them a good example of piety and virtue, and sealing the whole with his blood.—But, at the same time, they represent him as a *mere fallible* and even *peccable* man, as the son of *Joseph and Mary* in the common way of nature!!!

Can there possibly be any greater or more striking contrast, between any sentiments or language in the world than appears in this view?—When we read the account, and contemplate the idea the sacred penmen give us of this **GRAND PERSONAGE**, our *hearts burn within us* ; while that which these gentlemen give us, feels, comparatively, as

cold as ice in the highest latitude of the frigid zone.

Accordingly the public discourses of the preachers of this cast, in general, consist *only* of some ingenuous speculations on the divine benevolence, dry encomiums on the beauty of virtue, and the *dignity* of human nature; or, at best, a judicious arrangement of the evidences in favour of Christianity; and exhortations to piety and virtue; all very good in their place, and with their proper accompaniments; but not so when made the *whole* of religion. Hence the thinness of their congregations, and the little regard their preachments meet with from the most serious part of the *common people*. Let them preach as the apostles and primitive ministers did, *who determined to know nothing amongst their hearers but JESUS CHRIST, and him crucified*, and speak like them to the *common sense and feelings* of mankind; let

let them tell them plainly and faithfully of their miserable condition as sinners, their moral depravity, guilt, and danger, and how their offended God, of his pure goodness, has provided for them an all-sufficient SAVIOUR ; let them hold him up to the view of their auditors, in all the divine excellencies of that important character ; expatiate on the amazing greatness of his love, and how true it is, that he is *made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption*. Let them press upon their attention the necessity of *repentance towards God, and faith in our LORD JESUS CHRIST*, as *the way, the truth, and the life, and that no man comes unto the Father, with acceptance, but by him ;—* shew them the nature and importance of that *great moral change*, called by CHRIST, a being *born again of the Spirit*, or that *holiness without which no man shall see the LORD*. and how it is effected.—Let them

do all this in the plain pathetic manner of the sacred oracles ; and so as at once to inform the understanding, and affect the heart ; that is, instruct the ignorant, alarm the stupid, encourage the serious inquirer after salvation, and build up the true believer in his holy faith, comfort and obedience ; and while they strenuously insist on the *various duties of the Christian life*, and endeavour to explain and enforce them, let it be so as always to keep their hearers in sight of the gracious power necessary to the proper discharge of them, and the certainty of obtaining it, when sincerely sought for in the diligent use of the appointed means. Let them do all this, not in their usually cold speculative way, but with that animating spirit and zeal, which just views of ourselves, of CHRIST, of GOD reconciling the world to himself ; by him, and of an awful eternity, tend to inspire. In a word, let them inter-
weave

weave into their system of morals the *golden thread of evangelical grace* ; draw their reasons and motives to the *precepts* from the *distinguishing facts, doctrines, and promises* of the gospel.* Let them do this, and they will soon experience a very different reception from the common people, who have any taste for religion, any concern about their duty and happiness ; but the salvation of whose souls is as precious in the sight of God, as those of the greatest philosophers.

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* We, who take things just as we find them in our BIBLES, are so clear in this matter, that we imagine we may appeal to the good sense and judgment of our *rational* divines themselves, with the fullest confidence of their deciding in our favour, whether the idea of the person and mediation of CHRIST, and his grace, which we entertain, does not infinitely more honour to HIM, and to the divine benevolence ; set our obligations to both in a much stronger light, and consequently tend infinitely more to animate our devotion to God, and a virtuous conduct in life, than that cold, languid, and almost lifeless idea they give us.

The bulk of mankind want either leisure or capacity, and many of them both, for speculative disquisitions and refinements in the *rationale* of religion. If we would get at their minds, and gain their attention, to any valuable purpose, it must be by such instructions and reasonings as are calculated to strike directly, upon their common sense and moral feelings, and such as arise naturally out of the first general principles before mentioned ; the plain facts recorded in the BIBLE ; and the unsophisticated doctrines evidently grounded upon them.

However, though we cannot but lament the prevalence of these errors, let us comfort ourselves with the hope that they will be of no long continuance*.

The

* Dr. Priestley tells us, that the *Unitarian and Socinian* doctrines are making a very rapid progress in the world ; and that he is very sure they will soon triumph

The truth is great, and will prevail in due time. The light that now attends the spirit

umph over all opposition, and last for ever. We are as confident of the contrary; for if, with the spirit of free inquiry, it pleases God to continue to mankind the use of their *common sense*, and the *BIBLE*, it appears to us *impossible*, that tenets, so contrary to both, should be of *long* continuance. The glare of false philosophy and hyper-criticism may dazzle the well-meaning mind *for a time*, but it cannot *always* do so; it is a force upon nature which she will resist and overcome in the end.

“*Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret.*”

The gracious sovereign of the universe will not always leave mankind thus to abuse their own understandings, and trifle with his sacred word, as these gentlemen appear to us to do. We allow them extensive knowledge, integrity, piety; but even wise and good men may be mistaken, and greatly deficient in spiritual discernment; witness even the apostles of Christ, as to the chief design of his coming into the world, and the true nature of his kingdom, before his ascension, and the effusion of his spirit on the day of Pentecost: and for some years after that event, Peter and others of them were much in the dark about the *Mosaic ritual*, and the lawfulness of admitting the Gentile converts into the Christian church without circumcision.

spirit of free investigation, in matters of religion, is increasing apace, and will shine more and more, no doubt, unto the perfect day; when that heterogeneous mixture of *truth* and *error*, which has hitherto so tainted the schemes of our various party-mongers, and so long pestered the Christian church, shall be separated, as pure metal from the dross; and the simple *truth as it stands* in the book of JESUS, be cordially embraced, and more generally acquiesced in, by all *real* Christians. Happy day! may it soon arrive, with all its train of celestial blessings, purity, righteousness, love, and peace; extending their benign influence through every kindred, tongue, and nation!

• But, amidst our most pleasing hopes, we must yet expect to meet with many occasions for the exercise of our faith and patience. The Great Sovereign generally carries into execution the designs of his goodness to the children of men
by

by degrees, with a wise mixture of circumstances, calculated to excite their hopes and fears, draw their attention to *his hand* in all, and make them more deeply sensible of their dependance upon him. Thus he acts in the *natural world*; the vegetable springs up a tender shoot, and attains to its full growth, by a slow progress. Man himself, from the feeble state of infancy, rises progressively into more perfect and vigorous maturity; the refinements of civilization, in all countries, have been carried on by degrees; and the like is observable in the progress of the arts and sciences, and the discoveries of natural philosophy. And that this is the case in the moral world, both sacred and profane history abundantly testify. God undoubtedly could have so ordered the constitution of the human mind, and the circumstances of the various objects presented to its notice, that

man

man, in the earliest ages of time, should have been acquainted with both natural and religious truths, as full as we are now, or posterity will be in the happy day expected; yet it is evident from the *fact* that he has not done so, but, on the contrary, opens the plan of human happiness, not only progressively, but by *slow gradations*, as they appear to us. *Why* he acts in this manner is amongst the *arcana* of his government, into which it would be extremely impertinent and even presumptuous for us to pry, any farther than he is pleased to open the way, in the course of his providence and by the lights afforded us in his word. While, therefore, we are indulging the spirit of inquiry, and think freely, let us with patience wait for these openings, nor affect to be *wise above what is written*, or aim at *knowledge in the ways of God too high for us*; particularly, let us not indulge the weak imagination of too many, that
all

all true religion lies in their *own party nostrums*, or a peculiar set of phrases; but study the scriptures impartially, be open to conviction; and yet beware of taking *appearances* for *realities*, and of deciding too hastily. This is the way to come at truth ourselves, and to lead others into it. The main aim of most of our religious disputants is *victory*, not *truth*. Not a fair discussion of the subject in question, but the support of their own prejudged sentiments about it*. This conduct

* There is nothing more common amongst our religious disputants, than to take it for granted, without the least hesitation, that *their own* system of opinions is, and *must* be, *right*. Hence they not only *contend* with their *opponents*, but even *read the Scriptures*, not with any design to *discover* the truth, but to *establish* their *own* idea of it. They fix the stamp of infallibility upon their peculiar notions, and set all farther investigation at defiance. This is a conduct far from rational; it is absurd even in the extreme; their case, though so dangerously erroneous, is desperate, out of the reach of all the ordinary means of recovery.

conduct we should make it a point to avoid, as strongly tending to blind the understanding, warp the judgment, and so contract and shut up the mind, as to exclude all hope, and even possibility of conviction. The man that suffers himself to be thus governed, may make a flaming bigot, but never become a solid, rational, enlightened Christian.

Diversity of opinions in religion is, in the present state of human nature, absolutely unavoidable, and in itself perfectly harmless; the bad effects of it are owing entirely to the evil dispositions, bigotry, and persecuting zeal of their respective patrons. If this diversity be maintained with that candour and benevolence Christianity teaches, it may be made eminently serviceable to its interest. It naturally tends to rouse the minds of men from that indolence into which they are so apt to fall : to assist and animate the spirit of free inquiry in
its

its researches after truth; inspire them with the laudable ambition of excelling one another in useful knowledge, piety, and virtue, as the best recommendation of their respective tenets; put them upon their guard against the impositions of designing men, and a more attentive study of the sacred oracles, the only outward standard of genuine orthodoxy. In a word, this diversity of sentiment in religion affords us a more ample scope for the exercise of our brotherly love, and is one of the clearest proofs of its sincerity; and thus contributes to the more abundant increase of our own happiness, and that of society, till the wished-for event takes place, when we shall be all more entirely of one mind, and more cordially united in the bonds of pure evangelical affection.

The great design of all the doctrines of CHRIST is, to make us truly pious, temperate, just, benevolent, and happy.

I

That

That *mode* therefore of understanding those doctrines, or those schemes of religious faith and worship, which we find, by experience, most conducive to these great ends, should undoubtedly be embraced* ; but of this, common sense will tell us, every man must be left to judge for himself under the guidance of that light and moral feeling God has given him, which, in every one sincerely

* The moralizing tendency of the gospel, or its fitness to promote true piety and virtue, is one of its brightest ornaments, and affords one of the most convincing evidences of its divine original. The man that receives it into his heart, and lives habitually under its influence, *hath a witness in himself*, to his own comfort, and such as all the most subtle arguments of infidels, and the utmost efforts of the powers of darkness can never confute. Nor can mankind be ever happy, but as they live under its influence ; and when they come to do this in general, they will be universally so. That system of doctrine and worship, therefore, that we find possesses most of this tendency, we should choose and practise. And of this we must be our own judges.

cerely desirous of knowing the truth, will be attended with humble and fervent prayer for the divine assistance.

That set of religious opinions that would exceedingly delight and edify one man, and most effectually animate him in his course of Christian duty, may be very disgustful to another, and strike such a deathful coldness upon his pious affections and virtuous endeavours, as would be highly prejudicial to his best interest, and, therefore, not to be endured. Hence SEPARATE SOCIETIES, AND DIFFERENT MODES OF WORSHIP BECOME INDISPENSIBLY NECESSARY. For instance,—

What edification or comfort could a strict *Trinitarian* find in a constant attendance upon the public worship of the strict *Unitarian*? or the latter, in his attendance on that of the former? the *Trinitarian* would think, with painful concern, that the *Unitarian* robbed the

SON, his dear Redeemer, and the HOLY SPIRIT, his sanctifier and comforter, of the *glory due to their names*, and which he rejoices to give them. On the other hand, the *Unitarian* would consider the *Trinitarian* as no better than an idolater in fact, though not in intention, and feel his indignation kindle at the idea.

The pious *Calvinist*, who is zealously attached to the peculiarities of his system, and is desirous of receiving the *sincere milk of the word, so as to grow thereby*, in the knowledge and grace of CHRIST, believes those peculiarities *essentially necessary* to that end; and imagines, at least, that he feels the thought of being one of the chosen objects of special and discriminating grace warm his heart, and inspire it with the most lively gratitude and love to GOD; animate him in his course of duty, render sin more hateful, holiness more desirable, CHRIST more precious; and, in a word, build him

him up in the power and comforts of the divine life; and, therefore, gladly attends the preaching and prayers that favour most of what he calls the *distinguishing doctrines of the gospel*; and without which he would think the finest preaching in the world no gospel at all, and that his soul would be starved for want of its spiritual food, if obliged to sit under it.

On the other hand, the serious Christian, who considers those peculiarities as not only unscriptural, but also as greatly depreciating the divine goodness to the children of men, and totally inconsistent with it, would feel himself very uncomfortable, and the seasons of worship even painful trials, were he obliged to attend the preachments and prayers fraught with the peculiarities of *rigid Calvinism*; but would find his whole soul filled with devout admiration, love, and praise, at the hearing of the

universality of the divine grace; that the blessed JESUS *tasted death for every man; was a ransom for all; a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.* He would tell us that this more enlarged idea of the benevolence of the DEITY, not only did the highest honour to the divine perfections and government, but also, at the same time, afforded his mind the sweetest consolation, and the most animating motives to repentance and holiness, by giving him not a *precarious and uncertain hope, but the most absolute assurance,* that JESUS CHRIST *did so love HIM, as to give himself for him:* that the blessings of his gracious salvation are as free for him, as for any other; that, therefore, confessing and forsaking his sins, *he shall most assuredly find mercy; and consequently that to continue in sin in the face of such universal goodness, and the peculiarly endearing motives to forsake it*
thence.

thence arising, would be the basest ingratitude, and bring upon his soul the tremendous guilt of *denying the Lord that bought him* ! he would tell us, that while this idea of redeeming grace gave a more lively ardour to his love of God, it also expanded his heart with the most benevolent concern for the happiness of all mankind ; disposed him to consider and treat them as his brethren, the children of the same father, redeemed by the same precious blood, to the possibility and hope of the same salvation.

With such sentiments impressed on his mind, he would be miserable to be deprived of the opportunities of hearing of what he esteems, not only wholesome and sound doctrine, but perfectly *scriptural and essentially necessary* to his edification and comfort.

And with respect to the *forms* of religious worship, the lofty arch of the

cathedral,* the solemn gloom which the Gothic style of architecture spreads through it, ~~into~~ the mind of the *honest* *churchman* with a kind of sacred awe : the high opinion he has from his childhood, been taught to entertain of the doctrine and worship of a church, established by all the legislative powers of his country, and sanctioned by even the blood of so many martyrs ; the high dignity and splendor of its bishops ; the dress of its priests ; the gravity of its prayers ; the bowings and crossings, and other ceremonious parade of its service ; all conspire to warm his heart, and draw out his affections, with, what appears to him, a pious ardour towards the great object of his devotion, and give him peculiar satisfaction and pleasure ;—
while,

* Alluding to a passage in Dr. Biss's writings, where he speaks of bowing down under the loftiness of the cathedral, as an help to devotion.

while the *conscientious dissenter* thinks he sees so many errors, it not in the doctrines, yet in the constitution and discipline of the established church; so many humanly invented ceremonies, bordering on superstition, and at the same time finds her making such high claims to implicit obedience to her authority, and even that authority dependent entirely upon the will of the state, that he cannot, without doing violence to his conscience, and essentially prejudicing his best and dearest interest, stately attend its public worship, and give himself up to its government. He thinks highly of the importance of maintaining the rights of private judgment, and religious liberty, which that church denies him; and prefers, what *he* esteems a more apostolic constitution and discipline of Christian societies, and where he thinks he finds a more scriptural form of public devotion, much better adapted

adapted to his moral taste, and his growing improvement in piety and virtue; and therefore seeks to worship his GOD; in a manner consistent with his principles.

That eminently sober and peaceable body of conscientious Christians, commonly called *Quakers*, sincerely think they perceive these and many other weighty reasons for *dissenting*, not only from the established church, but from us all; and that, in order to their worshipping GOD according to the dictates of his HOLY SPIRIT, and their *inward* experience and enjoyment of his blessed presence, they think it is their indispensable duty to form themselves into distinct societies, though united amongst themselves by one peculiar bond of Christian fellowship, and to carry on the great business of Christian worship and discipline, in their own peculiar way; which *they feel* much better adapted to their
their

their spiritual edification; and would sacrifice even their lives, if called to it, in support of the testimony they bear to what they judge the TRUTH, against the spirit of the world; and all human inventions in religion; and who that reverences conscience would not indulge them?

From this view of things, it appears highly reasonable that the same liberty should be allowed not only to these, but to all other religious sects amongst us; Methodists, Moravians; Papists, New Jerusalemites, &c. &c. while they appear to carry on the business of social worship in the fear of God, in a peaceable manner, and a sincere concern to promote the interest of piety and virtue.

SECTION

SECTION V.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.

SINCE it is so evident that a uniformity in the *theory*, and even the *practice* of religion, is by no means to be expected, or indeed *possible**, in the present

* Some will say, perhaps, "that the powers of *church and state* united, may very properly interpose in this matter; the one by making *creeds and articles of faith*, and constituting the modes of worship; the other by making laws, or *acts of uniformity*, to oblige the people to believe and worship accordingly, upon certain pains and penalties."—We reply, this method has been tried, but instead of producing the effect pretended, has produced just the contrary. And no wonder; for it is a measure not at all adapted to the case. Religion is a personal thing, between God and every man's own conscience. The belief of its doctrines, and practice of its duties, must be matter of *free choice*, the result of *inward conviction*, and not of *external force*, and therefore, till *uniformity* can be produced, by such *conviction*, Christian charity should supply the place of *authoritative compulsion*; such an exercise of power, in any form whatever, in matters of religion,

present state of human nature, our indispensable duty must be **MUTUAL FORBEARANCE**, granting to others the same indisputable right of judging and choosing for themselves, as we claim for ourselves in this case ; laying aside all wrath, bitterness, and evil speakings ; putting on charity, cultivating universal benevolence and peace. All this is so plain, that one would think we might venture

religion, is founded in injustice, oppressive, and cruel, and no better than a presumptuous invasion of the sacred prerogative of the **LORD** of conscience.

The most effectual means of producing a uniformity in religion, upon any other plan than that of *rational conviction*, would be to deprive the common people of the use of the Bible, in their mother tongue ; and oblige them to receive their religion from the dictates of their *spiritual guides* ONLY. It was by this means the church of Rome kept up her sovereignty over the consciences of men for ages, with a surprizing degree of *uniformity*. The giving the Bible to the common people, in a language they understood, gave the deepest wound to her ecclesiastical despotism, and contributed more than any thing (as a mean) to the effecting the Protestant Reformation in which we glory.

venture to appeal even to the most furious bigot, in his cooler moments, whether this is not far more agreeable to the genius of the gospel, than that despotic, persecuting, anathemizing spirit he is so fond of indulging ; so however, the great apostle *Paul* seems to have thought, amidst all his ardent concern for the purity of the gospel doctrines and worship, from what he has said in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of his Epistle to the *Romans* ; the thirteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, and in many other places. The *charity that hopeth all things*, will find good people in all parties, holding the main leading principles of Christianity, and will teach us to make great allowances for the prejudices of education, the want of better information, and many other circumstances that often give a wrong bias to the most upright mind. The church at *Corinth* was, at one time miserably

miserably degenerated, and bewildered in their religious notions ; but the apostle did not, (as many of our hot heads would have done,) *unchristian* them. We should in these cases ever remember that we are, at most, *pleaders at the bar*, not *judges on the bench*, as a good man once said.

Some of the *Socinian* doctrines do indeed, appear to many of us, EXTREMELY UNSCRIPTURAL, to say the best ; of a tendency subversive of the distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, and consequently prejudicial to the interest of pure evangelical piety and virtue, as well as highly derogatory to the honour of the SAVIOUR. The *wood, hay, and stubble*, the apostle speaks of as disgraceful to the foundation on which they are built, and will, therefore, at last, be burnt up ; yet the builders themselves saved, *though so as by fire*. For, it must be acknowledged, that however wide of the truth these sentiments are, there
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is a very great and essential difference between *them* and *Deism*: though it must also be confessed, that the transition from the *former* to the *latter*, is so easy and natural to the minds of half enlightened speculatists (with which the world abounds) that it is no wonder the number of infidels should be so *increased* and *increasing*, as we find, by sad experience, it is. Whilst, on the other hand, as the transition from the *latter* to the *former* is so short, and attended with so few difficulties, it appears surprising that any of the more sober and virtuous among the Deistical tribes, should hold it out as they do, against the many ingenious and powerful arguments of our philosophic Christians. But, indeed, the case is, the farther the mind of fallen man departs from the humble simplicity of truth, the harder is the task of returning to it. Add to this, that these gentlemen rely, with too much confidence

confidence, on the *words of man's wisdom*, and pay too little regard to the peculiar grace of CHRIST crucified, which is the *wisdom and the power of GOD* to salvation, and which gives the Christian doctrine all its prevailing energy. Without these considerations it would be very difficult to assign a reason, why a serious *Theist*, whether *Jew*, or *Gentile*, or *Mahometan*, should so obstinately oppose the good-natured gospel of our condescending Christians; for, excepting the idea of the gospel itself being of divine original, or a preter-natural revelation from the GOD of truth, (a fact easily demonstrated to an humble mind) there is nothing required by these theological refiners, as matter of belief, but what a *Theist* might admit, without doing any great violence to his prejudices or degrading his reason. Not only the very obnoxious doctrines of the *Trinity*, and of the *divinity of CHRIST*, even in their most qualified scriptural sense, but also

of the *pre-existence of CHRIST*, his *miraculous conception and death as a propitiatory sacrifice* for the sins of men, or of their salvation through the merits of his mediation, and the power of his grace, which were such *stumbling blocks to the Jews, and to the Greeks, foolishness*; all these doctrines are so softened down by some of our rationalists, and by others of them so entirely given up, as not to leave even the least occasion of any serious offence, to any sober Theist*.

But though the sentiments of these gentlemen may appear to us exceedingly erroneous, and of a tendency dangerous to the interest of religion, and, consequently, that it is our duty to oppose their progress to the utmost of our power ;

* Dr. Tillotson, Vol. iii, Page 284, intimates, that the Jesuit missionaries amongst the Chinese, to avoid the offence the notion of a crucified Saviour would give them, denied that CHRIST was crucified ; asserting that it was an invention of the Jews to disgrace Christianity.—Doddridge's *Expositor*, Vol. iv. Page 233.

power; yet we should remember, that it is also our duty to take particular care, that our most zealous efforts may be always under the government of that candour and benevolence which distinguishes the spirit of Christianity from that of the world, and to which we are naturally led by the consciousness of our own fallibility. However mistaken these people may be, yet while they continue to own JESUS CHRIST as their LORD and SAVIOUR, support his cause in general, as the cause of truth, and lead pious and virtuous lives, we should not deny them the honour of the Christian name, rank them amongst absolute infidels, and consign them to eternal perdition, as too many do: They have still a right to a place in our fraternal affection*, and we

K 2 should

* It is remarkable, and worthy of our imitation, that the Apostle addresses those of his hearers whom he charges with the horrid guilt of murdering the Son of God, his brethren, Acts ii. 17.

should pity and pray for them, and by all rational means endeavour to reclaim them ; but by no means revile and persecute them, or even hurt an hair of their head.

It is much to be lamented, that the party which claim a kind of *exclusive right* to the revered title of *orthodoxy*, are generally more disposed to *intolerance* in religion than their opponents, whom they are so forward to brand with the **BLACK MARK OF DAMNABLE HERESY**; and flatter themselves that they please GOD, and serve the interest of truth, by this spirit of violence !! It must, indeed, be confessed that there are some furious bigots amongst the *Heterodox*, that fall very little short of those angry zealots ; but upon the whole, the balance of candour appears to be much in favour of the latter. Accordingly we find, that whilst our *vehemently orthodox* brethren,

brethren, in their controversial writings and discourses, so often work up their resentment against the errors they oppose, beyond due bounds, and deal out their anathemas so freely, their antagonists distinguish themselves by arguing closely, and with a moderation that does them honour; and, at the same time, tends very strongly to prejudice the cool thinking mind in favour of their sentiments. Happy would it be for the interest of religion, if our orthodox champions, would in this instance, follow their example.

“ Fas est ab hoste doceri.”

The most sensible part of mankind, are generally more inclined to hearken to the reasonings, and embrace the sentiments of the candid and benevolent, and who are most disposed to allow them the liberty of examining the subject fairly, and determining for them-

K 3 selves,

selves, than to those of a wrathful, overbearing, and intolerant spirit.

Whenever our *zeal* for GOD is mixed with the headstrong passions of our depraved nature, and actuated by them, it will always exceed the bounds prescribed to it, by the *wisdom that is from above* ; and when it does so, will be so far from convincing our opponents of the truths we contend for, that it will confirm them the more in their supposed errors. However warm our love of truth, it should be always governed in its operations by *the love of GOD*, and of *our neighbour*. There is more of the malevolent spirit of *Satan*, than of that of the meek and benevolent *JESUS*, in persecuting and anathemizing one another, on the account of our different sentiments in religion. We never find the apostles reviling, or, in any shape, persecuting, even the Heathens, but endeavouring to persuade them, by the
 most

most affectionate entreaties, *to forsake their dumb idols, and serve the living God.* And with the same benevolent spirit, they exhort Christians, notwithstanding any difference of opinion about the *modes* of faith and worship, to LOVE ONE ANOTHER ; FOLLOW THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR PEACE, and affectionately unite in the defence of their common Christianity*. But in spite of common sense, as well as apostolic exhortations to Christian charity, the zealots of all parties, not content with what cool rea-

K 4 soning

* Nothing has done so much injury to the cause of Christianity, and so greatly promoted that of infidelity, as Christians persecuting one another. The servants of God, though commanded to contend and strive for the faith ; yet are charged *not to strive*, but with the force of reason and argument, " to be gentle towards all men, apt to teach, patient ; in meekness *instructing* those who oppose themselves. That is, must not use any kind of external force, but confine themselves entirely to the means of internal conviction and demonstration of the truth.

soning and argument can do towards supporting the cause of truth, are mightily prone to go the other (and as they think the shorter) way to work ; and by exciting jealousies and suspicions of each other, on the most frivolous occasions, and thereby inflaming their mutual animosities, work themselves up to all the outrageous violence of persecution, and glory in it.

This is too much the case at present between the two great religious parties in this nation, viz. *the adherents to the established church, and the dissenters from it*. It is really afflicting to the sober friends of the peace and welfare of their country, to meet with so many inflammatory paragraphs, as we continually do, in our news-papers, and magazines, and even in some sermons, and other pamphlets ; which are so far from answering any good end to the public, that they fail of answering that which lies still
nearer

nearer the hearts of the authors, even the little paltry end of promoting their own party interest ; and, in short, serve only to provoke each others resentment.

The violent partizan of the established church tells us, in his usual tone of over-bearing angry zeal, that the *dissenters* are all republicans, and consequently sworn enemies to both *church and state* ; and on this ground, endeavours, by all possible means, to excite the jealousy and indignation of the ruling powers against them, and persuade them to exercise some of their wholesome severities upon such *pestilent fellows*. Whereas, in fact, taking all the dissenters together, there will scarcely be found one in a thousand, a real republican,* or

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* Even Dr. Priestley, one of the most obnoxious of them, declares himself a sincere friend to our civil constitution and form of government, as consisting of King, Lords, and Commons.

an enemy to our present constitution: However it is certain that *republicanism* is by no means the necessary consequence of *dissenting* from the established church; and that there are really more republicans within the pale of the church (at least nominally so) than amongst the religious part of the dissenters; even the famous *Thomas Paine* declares he is not a *Presbyterian*; and there is no doubt of the truth of his declaration. In fact, the main body of the violent sticklers for *liberty*, and particularly for *republicanism*, are *Deists* or *Atheists*, men of no religion at all. So that the high churchman, in the eagerness of his zeal for the safety of the church, has thrown himself upon a wrong scent, and miserably mistaken the object of his resentment,

There is, indeed, no *fact* in the world more notorious, than that the *generality of Protestant dissenters* have been for a long series of years, and still are, steady, zealous,

zealous, and sincere friends to the Protestant religion, under whatever external form it may appear, and to the civil constitution of this country, as settled at the Revolution ; particularly so to the succession of the crown in *the illustrious House of Hanover*. In the rebellions which took place in the years fifteen and forty-five, the Protestant *dissenters* were amongst the foremost that distinguished themselves as truly loyal subjects. Not a man of them appears amongst the adherents to the Pretender, which is more than their enemies can say of themselves ; and they have continued the same attachment to this day. Some few amongst them, indeed, (though a very few) provoked by the insolence of the persecuting zealots on the other side, may have discovered too great vehemence in favour of their civil and religious rights and liberties, particularly respecting the *repeal of the*
test

test laws; and may have talked and written in a stile too peremptory; but their conduct has been sincerely condemned by the general body;—for, though they consider those laws as unjust and oppressive, respecting themselves, and calculated to expose religion to the scorn of its enemies, by prostituting one of its most sacred institutions, to serve political purposes, which after all it does not serve, as it avails only to the exclusion of the honest conscientious Christian, and opens the door to the profane and vicious infidel;—yet they mean not to seek deliverance from these evils, but in a fair, open, peaceable, constitutional way; which they certainly have a right to do.

However, this over-eager zeal, on their part, has, unhappily, awakened the very irritable *spirit of high churchism*, and put it into a terrible ferment; so that the poor, ignorant, affrighted multitude,

multitude, possessed by it, can scarcely talk, or even think of any thing, but of the eminent *danger the church* is in, from the machinations of the *dissenters**. And, to enforce the tremendous idea the more effectually, we are reminded of the ruin brought upon it by the abettors of the *Oliverian democracy*. This outcry leads

* This alarming outcry about the *danger of the church* from the dissenters, which has been lately roused from its long (and we hoped, everlasting) slumbers; and that has so awakened the *wrath*, as well as the *fears* of the half-thinking bigotted multitude, is to the last degree stupid, senseless, malevolent, and without even the least foundation in truth, as many years experience has demonstrated. Her greatest danger *really lies* in the intolerant, persecuting spirit of her *professed* friends and supporters. If ever she is ruined, it will be owing to the sacrilegious violence of their hands, and not to the dissenters; their fervent and sincere wish, in general, is, to live peaceably with her, in the enjoyment of their common rights and privileges, as fellow citizens. They seek not the *subversion* of the CHURCH itself, but *deliverance* from HIGH CHURCH *tyranny*; not to deprive others of their *Christian liberty*, but to enjoy their own.

leads our touchy dissenting brethren, to remind us, on the other hand, of the persecuting tyranny of the church party in 1652, &c. when so many of their forefathers, and their families, were ruined, as to this world, *merely* for worshipping God according to the dictates of their consciences; and, with serious concern, observe how much of the same persecuting malevolence now possesses the heart of the high churchman;—how ardently he pants for an opportunity of pouring out his indignation upon his non-conforming neighbours; and how eagerly he catches at every occasion, even the most innocent, of representing them as a dangerous set of people, aiming at the destruction of both *church and state*, than which nothing can be more false, unjust, and slanderous.

Instead of thus provoking one another to discord, hatred, strife, and thus mutually inflaming the malevolent affections
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of their depraved nature, would it not be infinitely better, to *provoke one another to love and good works*?—To cherish the generous spirit of Christian candour, and mutual forbearance? Study the *things that make for peace*, and tend to edification in the divine life? Certainly it would:—It would be far more becoming the Christian character, to which they pretend, and most effectually promote their mutual happiness. It is *afflicting*, yea even *astonishing*, to a considerate mind, to see such monstrous inconsistency and extremity of folly, as that above hinted, amongst people professing the wise, the benevolent, the peaceable religion of JESUS.—If Christians indeed, as both sides pretend (and many of them are) are they not the children of the same heavenly father?—Do not they hold the same general principles of religious faith and practice?—Trust in the same mediator, and entertain

certain the hope of the same eternal life and glory ?—Why then hate, villify, and persecute one another ?—Why should one party claim a right of judging for themselves, in the important business of religion, and not allow the same liberty to the other, when neither will dare to set up for infallibility ?—If there be in the world, any one particular ecclesiastical constitution, to which the actual enjoyment of that liberty, in *its fullest extent*, can be *really dangerous*; it must be, because such constitution is founded upon wrong principles ; for, it is certain, that such liberty and pure evangelical truth can never be at variance, or in the least degree prove injurious to each other.

The zealots on both sides mistake the matter entirely, and go the way to defeat their own favourite ends and purposes. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* A just cause requires not

not the unnatural aid of persecution, in any shape, to support it; and an unjust one always injures itself by such measures, by provoking the resentment of the sufferers, and putting the bystanders upon inquiry.

The blessed GOD who has called us to peace, has solemnly charged us to *follow it with all men, and forbear one another in love. These are great and essential duties*, in comparison of which even the most flaming zeal in support of our respective *nostrums*, is less than nothing and vanity; and, indeed, as it is too often managed, an heinous sin in the sight of GOD.—There is, in short, no surer sign of *a weak head and a bad heart* in any man, than his hating and persecuting those who differ from him in religion. It is the very mark that distinguishes the followers of the Antichristian beast.

But let it be ever remembered, that

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the *Spirit of free inquiry*, in its fullest extent, if prudently conducted, is perfectly consistent with that of Christian candour, moderation, and charity. We may certainly search after truth, examine the various pretensions to it, with the greatest freedom, and even differ from one another in our ideas about it, without the least angry resentment or animosity. We should, however, be exceedingly careful not to abuse this liberty to any licentious purposes ;— nor to say or write any thing that may give the least *just* occasion of offence ; or excite any angry contentions, and party discords, either in church or state ; especially when the ruling powers there, though they may be thought to assume too much, in some instances, yet lay no pains or penalties upon us, but what may be borne, consistently with our more essential duties to God and our consciences, and the general peace

peace and welfare of our country ; which is the case with the dissenters amongst us :—They may be reasonably and safely allowed to unite in the common cause of liberty, and by sober arguments, peaceable remonstrances, and petitions, endeavour to persuade our governors to leave religion to stand upon its own bottom of rational conviction, without the application of any external *force*, leaving every man to judge for himself about it : But until such persuasion takes place, they should be content to *bear their reproach* with patience in the modest use of those means of deliverance.

Were this their temper and conduct in general, those poor creatures who are now so passionately fond of what appears to them to bear the *awful* stamp of ANTIQUITY, would not be so terribly frightened at the idea of INNOVATION as they are ; and in pro-

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portion

portion as their fears subside, their minds will be open to conviction, and the truth in time prevail. They would perceive, in many instances, that what *they* venerated as ANTIQUITY, was in reality INNOVATION, and what they called INNOVATION, nothing but ANCIENT TRUTH restored to its *primitive purity*. However,

According to this view of things we may, upon the whole, very justly conclude, that they who will seriously and deliberately assert, that there is no occasion for *any reformation*; no room for *any improvement* in our present constitution in church* and state; happy as in the main it is, must be amazingly infatuated by their prejudices, and miserably
lost

* There may be a reformation in the church without overturning it; or without destroying those fundamental principles, by which it is distinguished from other churches.

lost to all common sense, at least to the proper use of it.

On the other hand, the man that under the specious pretence of applying a remedy for the evils of either, and with the cry of *liberty* in his mouth, but with the spirit of *licentiousness* in his heart, is continually sowing the seeds of discontent amongst his fellow citizens, and by irritating their passions, endeavours to provoke them by acts of violence to overturn the whole system, must be as infatuated, and his zeal for reformation be little short of real madness.—

There is certainly a MIDDLE WAY, in this case, which is not only the most safe, but also the most sure and effectual; and which the wise and the good who love order and peace, will always wish to choose. May they do so in the particular circumstance before us, and proceed in it to the utter destruction of all tyranny and oppression on the

one hand ; and all anarchy and confusion
on the other !

“ *Scelera impetu, bona consilia
Mora, valescunt.*”

The divine Providence, always guided by infinite wisdom, and supported by Almighty Power in its operations, appears now, more than ever, to be directing its course, with increasing speed, towards its grand object, the happiness of mankind in the enjoyment of universal *light, liberty, and virtue* ; and, though ever so strenuously opposed by the wit and power of the ecclesiastical and political tyrants of this world, will most assuredly prevail in due time. There is, therefore, no occasion for the friends of this happiness to put themselves into any intemperate commotions, or use any sort of violence, in order to accomplish their wishes. *He that sitteth in the heavens* sees and laughs at the foolishness
of

of the wisdom, and the impotency of the rage, of all those who set themselves against HIM, and his ANOINTED. Let us then *be still, and know that he is GOD*, whose counsel shall stand against all opposition from the most powerful malevolence of his creatures. Let us make use of no weapons, in the *support of his kingdom*, but those of instruction and rational persuasion, animated by that hope which an humble confidence in his faithful promises tends to inspire. This is the true and only ground on which we may justly expect to meet with the concurring aid of the divine power in our favour.

As to our conduct respecting our social rights and liberties as men and fellow citizens, it should, undoubtedly, be regulated entirely by the benevolent spirit of the gospel, and the public welfare. GOVERNMENT is an ordinance of GOD, for the GOOD of mankind; and, as such,

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it is our indispensable duty to submit to it ;—but an *unjust, oppressive, and tyrannical administration of it*, may, and ought to be strenuously resisted, in the sober peaceable use of those means which the laws of GOD, and the constitution of our country, put into our hands, carefully avoiding all such *violent measures* as tend to enflame the passions of the idle and profligate multitude, and excite them to riot and plunder ; the consequence of which would be the utter subversion of all good government, upon which the happiness of society so eminently depends.

In a word, if we cannot preserve the civil rights of our country, without departing from our Christian principles, or that line of duty to God and man which our benevolent religion has prescribed to us, let us give them up, and resolve to bear the calamity with patience ; if Christians, indeed, the divine
promise

promise assures us *of a better country, even an heavenly* ; where all the felicity of which our nature is capable, will be enjoyed, in the highest perfection, through the endless ages of eternity ! The contemplation of this idea, in the lively exercise of that faith which is *the evidence of things not seen*, will afford us the sweetest and most effectual consolations in all the afflictive trials of life, and illuminate even the dark valley and shadow of death with the dawn of a most glorious immortality !

THE END,

APPENDIX.

A P P E N D I X.

As a farther Demonstration of the Loyalty of the Protestant Dissenters, and the fullest confutation of the unjust and libellous charges brought against them by their enemies, the following authentic paper is here inserted.

King's Head Tavern, Poultry, Dec. 12, 1792.

AT a numerous GENERAL MEETING, of the DEPUTIES from the several Congregations of PROTESTANT DISSENTERS, in and near London, convened for the special purpose of declaring their sentiments on the subject of the British Constitution.

On

On a motion being made and seconded,

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

That it is expedient and proper for this meeting to make a declaration of their sentiments on the Constitution of Great Britain.

A declaration in writing being produced, the same was agreed to be read as follows :

“ We feel ourselves called upon, at
“ the present period, publicly to de-
“ clare our firm attachment to the Con-
“ stitution of Great Britain, being per-
“ suaded ~~that it is excellent~~ in its prin-
“ ciples, and wisely framed for the ex-
“ tension of solid happiness and real
“ liberty.

“ It always has been, and still conti-
“ nues to be, our determined resolution
“ to contribute our best endeavours to
“ maintain and preserve, by all means in
“ our power, the Constitution of this
kingdom,

" kingdom, consisting of King, Lords,
 " and Commons; at the same time we
 " rejoice, as Britons, that one great me-
 " rit of this invaluable Constitution is,
 " that it contains within itself the means
 " both of reform and improvement.

" Having thus, in the most unequivocal
 " manner, declared our sentiments
 " at this critical juncture, it is a pleasing
 " reflection that this declaration is in
 " perfect consistency with the conduct
 " of the Protestant Dissenters ever since
 " the glorious Revolution of 1688,
 " which we consider as the basis of the
 " Constitution, and which happily con-
 " duced to the establishment of the pre-
 " sent royal family on the throne."

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY,

That the above declaration be agreed
 to and signed by the Chairman, and pub-
 lished in the morning and evening pa-
 pers, and by such other methods as the
 Chairman shall direct.

RESOLVED

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY

That the thanks of this meeting be given to the Chairman for calling them together, and for his impartial conduct.

E. JEFFERIES, CHAIRMAN.



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EFFECTS OF VANITY;

OR,

Mary Meanwell and Kitty Pertly, a Tale.

Written for the Use of SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

The Analytical Review for August, 1791, gives the following character of this work.

"This admirable little tale is so well calculated to impress the most useful lessons on the minds of a neglected class of our fellow creatures, that we highly respect the woman, (for we have been informed that it is a female production,) who, with superior abilities, condescends to employ her pen on such an humble subject.—There appears so much judgment and benevolence in this unassuming lady's artless instructions, that we must request her not to lay aside her pen, but continue to avail herself of a turn for observation, which enables her to speak to the heart, whilst she informs the understanding."

The Critical Review for September, 1791, says, it is "A plain, moral tale, told with judgment and propriety."

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"This simple little tale seems calculated to improve and interest the children for whose use it was written, and we therefore recommend it to the notice of the promoters of that useful institution, Sunday Schools, who will find it a sensible, moral performance."—*Analytical Review*, January, 1792.

The *Monthly Review* for January, 1792, speaking of the above publications, says, "They are two instructive tales, the one adapted to boys, the other to girls, to stimulate them to learning, by shewing the advantages to which it leads, and the evil tendency of idleness, and a want of a due education."

